LONG SHADOWS

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To Edith Peterson

from

Helen Olsen

Merry Xmas

Long Shadows

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NOTE

The theme is fairly clearly indicated in the first page. This is not a mystery story of the conventional kind, with detectives in ingenious clues and innumerable false trails. It is a chapter of history, and the interest lies rather in the motive for the crime, the search for which leads into the dark labyrinth of an African city, and in the mysterious character of "James Smith," *légionnaire*, journalist, lover and avenger.

LONG SHADOWS

By

CAMILLA HOPE

Author of "Moon of Joy"

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PROLOGUE

In the records of the C.I.D. the murder at Shells appears among the unsolved mysteries. The keenest brains and the most tireless investigation could discover neither motive, nor weapon nor clues. It was a coincidence—if the events of life are not foreordained—that there happened to be in the Inn at Shells at the time of the murder a man with an ear for music, a retentive memory and a fixed determination to avenge an old crime. The avenger had reasons for keeping his own counsel, and Scotland Yard knew nothing of the links in the chain which connected the enlistment, fifteen years before, of an English boy of nineteen in the Foreign Legion under the non-committal name of "James Smith," the fate, more dreadful than death, of an English girl in the ancient Moorish town of Fez, the mystery at Shells and the deaths a few months later of a venerable merchant and his son at Meknas in Morocco. It was a chapter of history; international intrigue played a part in the drama, Oriental subtlety, the hatred which smouldered between the Germans and the French before it finally blazed into the Great War, accident and grim calculation, love and revenge.

BOOK I

1912

PART I

JACQUES THE LEGIONNAIRE

I

On a day in March in one of those far off years before the War a slim, white-faced boy stumbled through the quaint narrow streets of the fortress town of Belfort. His blue serge suit was well cut and obviously expensive, but it had an indefinable appearance of slovenliness, a slightly crumpled air as if it had been slept in and had long been stranger to a brush. There was the same hint of disorder in the boy's whole appearance, a touch of wildness, of carelessness and haste. A very young-looking lieutenant came up the street and the boy spoke to him in admirable French.

"Would you please direct me, monsieur, to the recruiting office of the Foreign Legion?"

The lieutenant touched his *képi* politely and made an effort to conceal his astonishment.

"But certainly, monsieur," he replied courteously. "I am now on the way to the offices of the fortress."

The boy turned and walked beside him. The young officer kept looking at him hesitatingly with a suggestion of embarrassment.

"Pardon me," he stammered at length. "Although you speak French like a Frenchman are you not a foreigner? I may be able to assist you?"

The boy hesitated for a moment but decided that to show a measure of frankness would be the wisest course.

"Yes," he said with a rather twisted smile. "I am half English, but I wish to enlist in the Legion."

"Oh la, la," the lieutenant said, stopping short in his astonishment. "But you are so young."

"Not so young as I appear, monsieur," the boy said. He was, in fact, nineteen. The French officer stared incredulously for a second, then apologised for his curiosity and began to chat in a friendly way about the Legion, its history, its hardships and the mainly fictitious atmosphere of romance which it had gathered about itself. They reached presently a row of small buildings. Into one of these the lieutenant led the way and the boy followed, up a flight of steep, dark stairs into a little office, none too clean. At their entrance a corporal sprang up from his seat and saluted. The officer spoke to him in a low tone, then he saluted the English boy, gave him a friendly smile and clanked away down the stairs.

The Corporal turned to the stranger and

stared at him with a franker inquisitiveness than the officer had permitted himself.

"You have not the air of a man who *needs* to join the Legion, monsieur," he remarked interrogatively, but the boy making no reply, he went on more curtly: *"Votre nom?"*

Again there was an instant's hesitation before the boy replied, while he thought rapidly. To say that he was French or Belgian was a great temptation but they might ask him for his papers. Only as an Englishman could he escape such a demand.

"James Smith," he said as curtly as the corporal, and that gentleman smiled.

"The last one was John Smith," he volunteered. "Your brother, perhaps?"

The boy managed a rather sickly smile and the corporal gave him a friendly push through a door at the back of the room. *"Eh bien,"* he laughed. *"Le médicine* major will be here in a minute."

Inside the inner room the boy choked suddenly. Its atmosphere was unspeakably foul with lack of ventilation, unwashed humanity, dirt and filthy old clothes. The other recruits evidently *had* the air of men who needed to join the Legion; they had certainly not been clothed by Bond Street tailors nor educated at the French equivalent for public schools. The scourings of Paris and the Orient rather, and the boy who had given his name as "James Smith" gazed at them in dismay. Where was the fabled glamour of the *légionnarie* in these samples

of derelict humanity? They sat on benches against the wall waiting for their medical examination, and the newcomer's eyes wandered from one face to another in search of a possible comrade whose companionship might dislodge the fear which clutched at his heart. Ten men were there, old, young and middle-aged, but of these nine were certainly no use to him—half starved or wrinkled with vice; hunger, or wickedness, must have driven them to the oblivion of the Legion. The tenth man sat huddled naked on the bench; he was a boy, ruddy faced, flaxen haired, sturdy, with a look of half stupid bewilderment on his face. Drunk, perhaps, the English boy thought, but before he could question him the door opened and the officers came in. At once the doctor turned to him.

"Undress," he said curtly and stared as the boy with heightened colour and fumbling fingers took off the well cut suit and expensive underwear. He was hotly resentful at the ill-bred curiosity which his appearance evidently excited in this old town of Belfort, the headquarters of the Legion of the Lost, which must have seen other recruits at least as strange as himself. The other officers whispered together and stole furtive glances. But his hardly-acquired philosophy quickly came to the surface again; none of the romances about the Legion had pretended that it was a kid-glove affair.

The medical examination over, the corporal called out the names of the new recruits and one

by one they stepped forward and signed their names, without noticing, for the most part, what it was they signed. "James Smith" came last, and as he put that signature on the paper he saw that it was a contract for five years' service with the Foreign Legion. The recruits filed out and were marched to the barracks and left for a time to make what they could of each other. James Smith moved over quickly to the fair-haired boy with the bewildered face. "English?" he asked in a friendly tone. The boy looked at him without understanding for a moment. Then he smiled. "Nein. Deutsch," he answered. Smith stiffened. He was, after all, half French, and had no love for Germans, but his eyes roved over the other occupants of the room. Beggars, after all, cannot be choosers; he would go mad without a friend, and the German was the only possible one. The German boy, numb with some private misery, did not appear to notice the momentary hesitation. Smith sat down by him and misery suddenly overflowing at the prospect of a sympathetic listener, the German, whose name was Walther Oldberg, began to talk.

"Ach. Never shall I go home again," he lamented. "I am dead. My father and my brother would kill me if they saw me, my mother and sister pray that I am dead I, a soldier of Germany, have disgraced myself and am hidden here in the army of France, their enemy. A month ago I was doing my service in the German army. One night I was drunk and hit

an officer, a Prussian, but before he could call the guard I had run away. I slept in a ditch and threw away my uniform after I had bought clothes from a peasant. On a dark night I crept over the frontier. Where else but in the Legion could I hide myself? Yet I know that the Legion is Hell." He began to sob huskily, and Jimmy, embarrassed, tried to find something comforting to say.

"Oh well, in the Legion there is real fighting," he said soothingly. "It is not all parade work." Indignation calmed the German's grief.

"Is not the German Army real," he asked belligerently. "When the day comes will it not be able to fight?"

But James Smith was in no mood to quarrel with his new acquaintance. He cared nothing about the German army, and he was not at any time a quarrelsome person although it was a quarrel which had brought him there.

Next morning they assembled on the parade-ground, and to every man was given a franc and a loaf of bread, and the corporal marched them to the Marseilles train. At Marseilles they were marched to the little fort where the soldiers of the Colonial army waited for the next troopship for Africa: Spahis, Zouaves and Tirailleurs, seasoned soldiers who chaffed the raw recruits; and among them, darting here, there and everywhere, was a little fat man with greedy eyes looking for business—the buying of discarded clothes. "These poor *légionnaires* with pay of a *sou* a day! what a little nest egg they

might have, how many bottles of good Algerian wine at fifteen centimes a bottle might they not be able to buy if only they would sell him their civilian clothes?" James Smith, about to say carelessly with the lordly air of the existence he had left behind him, "You can have them; take them away," stopped short in time. He had, at the moment, money in his pocket, but when that was gone? He was lost, dead. No one would send him money, and the pay of a *légionnaire* was five *centimes* a day—three days pay would buy a bottle of wine, and, if the old soldiers spoke truly, wine was the only thing that made the Legion tolerable. He drove a surprisingly hard bargain for his surplus gear with the oily Levantine.

The troopship sailed. Marseilles disappeared. The hot sun beat down on the decks. Colonial soldiers spat and told tales, slept and ate and slept again and Oran rose before them, a gleaming pile of flat-roofed houses on hilly ground which climbed above the blue Mediterranean. James Smith gazed fascinated. Africa, for him, held a legendary glamour. He was an outcast, a fugitive, but he was nineteen and had soaked himself in tales of romance. All the violent colours of the East, the dust, the mingled stinks and perfumes, the hot sunshine, the glare of the white roofs, these, to the dreaming boy, were the garments of Romance. Negroes inadequately clad in loin cloth and red fez shuffled past carrying enormous burdens on their heads; taciturn Arabs stood indolently curious,

wrapped from head to foot in white burnous; smart French officers, dapper and self important, strolled along with their womenfolk, indifferent to these shabby recruits for that Legion which was the maid-of-all-work, the drudge, of the French Colonial army. The dejected company was marched to a horrible little room, unventilated, carpeted with rubbish, burnt-out cigarette-ends the only covering to the bare boards which formed the beds. A long, wooden bench ran along one side; a pitcher of water stood in one corner, a pile of thin brown blankets in another.

As a dormitory it seemed, even to James Smith's philosophy, a little comfortless; the three nights which he spent there were, with one exception, the least enjoyable of his life hitherto. But as on that one other he had gone down to the depths of Hell he found even the barracks at Oran tolerable. On the third day they entrained for Sidi bel Abbas, the African headquarters of the Legion, its nursery, its training ground, where the hearts of men were broken and their bodies killed or hardened into such a state of toughness that no other hardships could kill them. The first impression of Sidi bel Abbas was a strange one, overwhelmingly composed of jasmin and yellow dust and decay. Far away the ridges of the Thessala mountains glimmered palely golden; on the balcony of a slender minaret the *muezzin* in white flowing robes solemnly intoned the call to prayer: "La illa il Allah—God is great."

The detachment trudged along stolidly in the yellow dust and through a gate into the barracks of the Legion, destined to be home and prison to most of them for five interminable years. Still wrapped in a dream, James Smith stood silent in the babel which surrounded him, obeyed the corporal's orders to attend at the store-room and secure his kit, woke for a moment to chaffer hardily with a Jewish pedlar who clamoured to buy the rest of his civilian clothes, reported at the office of the company to which he was assigned, gave his name once more and received in exchange a number. *Légionnaire* 09776 swallowed up the small amount of personality which the pseudonym "James Smith" had left him.

It was not until he sat on his bed in his new quarters that he woke to a sense of reality once more. A middle-aged man with iron grey hair, dressed in the uniform of the Legion, stood at his side looking down on him with a sardonic grin on a face, naturally florid, which the sun of Africa had tanned to the colour of mahogany and the consistency of leather.

"They told me my brother had arrived," he roared shaking with mirth. "*Merde.* The rest are *canaille.* I suppose you answer to the name of James Smith?"

The boy looked up unsmilingly. "That's right," he acknowledged.

"Well, I'm brother John," the veteran roared. "Original of you, I must say, to choose James. Already in the barracks there are John

Jones and John Robinson. The three best known families in England are well represented. Got the price of a bottle of wine on you? Good. Let's cut over to the canteen, brother Jacques."

And "Jacques" it remained, for James Smith was only too anxious to sink the English half of him, though it was John Smith the Englishman who made life in the Legion bearable for him in the days which were to come. John Smith who befriended him, Abdul Malek the Arab, to whom he rendered a service, and Walther Oldberg, the German to whom he played the part of a rather stern foster-parent—to these three James Smith owed it that for nearly a year he kept his resolution not to let anyone know where he was. In less than a month the boy who was in him died, and even before that the dreamer had retreated so far into his subconsciousness that none might know it had survived. For in the Legion there is no time to dream. Work is its motto: Work without Pay.

He made the acquaintance of Abdul Malek in a dramatic fashion suitable to the part which the Arab was to play in his life and in the lives of those for whom he cared.

Some three months after his arrival in Sidi bel Abbas he was crossing the Place Sadi Carnot one evening when a great black stallion, riderless, with wildly tossing mane, thundered past him. The *légionnaire* drew aside, instinctively thinking first of his own skin, but his quick eyes saw a group of Arab children some way ahead directly in the path of the maddened horse.

Already the Legion's training had set its mark upon him; he was as hard as nails, with full command over his legs and wind. Swift as thought he ran and by a hair's-breadth snatched two of the children from under the thundering hoofs. One of those children was Abdul Malek's only son. Abdul Malek was a Moorish merchant of great wealth and greater influence who was visiting Sidi bel Abbas only for the day. In the extravagant manner of the Oriental he bade the *légionnaire* command him even to the half of his wealth; but Abdul Malek meant it, since his little son was the core of his heart. Jacques the *légionnaire* still had private funds and wanted no reward, but the Arab's gratitude embarrassed him, and not wishing to appear abrupt or discourteous he suggested adjournment for a cup of coffee, Abdul Malek being, as he rightly judged, a strictly orthodox "True Believer."

The suggestion met with the Arab's warm approval, and he led the *légionnaire* to the Moorish *café* of Ben Daoud, his friend and kinsman. Ben Daoud's coffee was a dream; Ben Daoud's gratitude on Abdul Malek's behalf a perennial spring, and the *café* became for the *légionnaire* a haven of refreshment and rest. Ben Daoud spoke only Arabic, and French soldiers seldom crossed his threshold. A magnificent Spahi with swinging blue cloak sometimes entered, but for the most part the customers were Arabs, inscrutable, silent in their mysterious white robes, sipping coffee, contentedly smoking gurgling *narghiles,* in grave silence playing chess.

Ben Daoud was deputed by Abdul Malek to play the part of a benevolent uncle and to anticipate the wants of his honoured guest. Jacques spent many happy evenings sucking at a *narghile* and learning colloquial Arabic which—strange taste in a *légionnaire*—he regarded as a diversion. There came a time when that indolently acquired knowledge was to save his life.

For nearly a year he remained "dead," while his private store of money, carefully husbanded, held out. But at the end of eleven months he changed his last franc at the canteen. That night he tossed and muttered in the grip of a frightful nightmare, and next day with shamefaced reluctance, feeling that for the second time he was playing the coward, he wrote a letter to England.

The answer came on a day on which he was on duty in the Arab prison, pacing, rifle with fixed bayonet over his shoulder, on the top of the broad wall which surrounded the prison and from which he had a view of all Sidi bel Abbas, still as a corpse in the terrible heat—a day which must inevitably awaken in the heart of an Englishman regretful memories of green meadows and gently rippling streams. Jacques' dreams were broken by the arrival of John Smith and another *légionnaire* with rations for the guards.

"There's a letter for you," the older man called out, but Jacques had to wait an interminable hour before he was relieved and could hold the precious missive in his hands. Then he was

afraid to break the seal; so much afraid, in fact, that he could not bring himself to open it until he was back in his quarters and by a lucky chance free for a minute from curious eyes. And perhaps for his honour it was as well that he was alone when he read it, for the letter underlined the folly of his flight.

Dear Jimmy, (the writer said):

For nearly a year I've tried to find you. I looked up, through de Belfort, the Legion, but "James Smith"! Why in Hell's name did you act the fool? I suppose you thought you had killed young Garfield. The blighter wasn't even seriously damaged and was walking about the next day as right as rain. And as for the girl—well! I suppose by this time even you realize that you backed the wrong horse. However, she tricked Garfield into marrying her and now they live a cat and dog life. So he's got more effective and longer lasting punishment than you could have awarded him with your fists. Five years hard labour I suppose you have undertaken as a penance. Send a line from time to time. Here's money for you. I'll send more at intervals. I won't, since you make a point of it, let your family know, but I give the promise under protest. It isn't treating them fairly. The old man, naturally, raised Cain, but your mother and sister were frightfully cut up. Write to them, there's a good lad. There's one thing: even when your penance is over you'll still be so young that there'll be time to conquer the

world. I'll send you some gossip in a week or two. Now I'm in a hurry to catch the post as you'll probably be in need of the draft. Here's luck.

Bill.

Bill was his friend and by fortunate chance a solicitor, and even in his headlong flight he had paused long enough to give Bill authority in the matter of his finances—not that they amounted to much. He lay on his back on his bunk and contemplated the ceiling. So he was not a murderer after all; and the man whom he had believed to be his friend until he had stolen the girl whom he, Jacques, imagined that he loved, was walking along familiar paths uninjured and in the company of the girl who had come between them. Garfield had spoken slightingly of her and Jimmy, in a rage, had hit the mocker suddenly and left him where he had fallen, still and pallid, with his head against a jagged rock and a thin stream of red dyeing the ground. All life had been illusion up to that moment in which he had proved himself to be a brawler and a coward. No! he could never go back. To his father a coward would be worse than a murderer. Of his mother he thought sadly, but the real sting lay in the separation from the little sister who had given him unquestioning adoration. No one, except perhaps a dog, would ever love him like that again. The dear kid, who seemed so much of a child although she was not much more than a year his junior! Perhaps from a distance, and himself unknown, he might

one day see her again. He roused himself. Ah well! good old Bill had sent him money; much trouble could be drowned in the canteen.

John Smith strolled into the room. "Price of a drink in that letter?" he asked with a hopeful grin, and Jimmy sprang to his feet.

Money makes even more difference to life in the Legion than it does to life elsewhere. For a time Jacques played with the idea of escape, but a difficult experience with Walther Oldberg saved him from that folly. *"Le cafard"* (the madness of the Legion, attacks every member of the corps in some way sooner or later, and the whole horizon is filled with no other thought save that of flight. Young Oldberg, sentimental as only a Teuton can be, was bound to suffer from it in a very virulent form. Jacques had a genuine, if half contemptuous, affection for the German. They were much of an age; they found themselves in this predicament through very similar acts of folly; they were both of superior education; they had both hugged their private miseries and confided in no one else. But Jacques had adjusted himself better; he was not by nature a sybarite; he had had John Smith and Abdul Malek as friends, and he had had money. In this respect young Oldberg was less fortunate. Jacques' moment of madness had taught him some wisdom; Oldberg would be equally mad a second time. Once *"le cafard"* had him in its grip he had no thought but of escape and no thought beyond it. He had no money, no knowledge of the country and no

knowledge of its habits or its tongue. Failure—as those of his comrades whom he took into his confidence (and they were far too many) told him—was inevitable. Yet there came an evening when young Oldberg did not answer the roll-call and was posted as a deserter. For that night Jacques could do nothing, but on the morrow he set about combing Oldberg's favourite haunts. He learnt news of the fugitive at several places, redeemed his uniform, fortunately complete in every detail, from a Jewish pedlar, and finally discovered the boy himself close hidden in the *"village négre,"* a quarter of the town out-of-bounds for the Legion. Oldberg was shivering in the grip of a fever; his madness had evaporated in the making of the effort and had left him panic-stricken, paralysed with terror and despair. Jacques was contemptuous but sorry. By a miracle he contrived to get the German back into barracks unseen, and Oldberg was lucky enough to escape with sentence of a month's imprisonment. The experience did two things for Jacques; it pushed from his mind for good any idea of attempting to escape, and it won young Oldberg's confidence so completely that Jacques learned from him things about the Oldberg family that were to be extremely useful to him later on. Walther's hatred and fear of the Legion, it appeared, was considerably less than his hatred and fear of his brother Fritz who lived at Dar el Baida in Morocco and was a prosperous and highly-respected merchant. But Fritz, said Walther,

was a good German patriot, a servant of the Fatherland—a secret agent, in fact—who would not hesitate to put the screw upon his young brother should he discover his whereabouts. Walther was a friendly, guileless youth who had not at any time a liking for spying; the idea of being forced to spy in the very ranks of the Legion filled him with terror. It was in vain that Jacques pointed out patiently that the elder brother could not coerce him if he stood firm. Fritz had, or Walther believed that he had, some hypnotic power over his younger brother; he had only to look at him to turn his bones to water. Jacques' mind subconsciously registered the fact that Fritz Oldberg was a man to be watched and feared. And, as if to emphasise the warning, Walther Oldberg had barely ended his month's imprisonment, when the word went round the company, "Maroc. Active service. The tribes are in revolt."

II

The revolt, as it turned out, was not of great consequence, and was speedily suppressed (to smoulder underground and burst out anew and more fiercely a year later) but the alarm had lasted long enough for the nth. company of the Legion to be sent to Dar el Baida. Jacques was delighted; the legends about Morocco rife in the Legion had something of the glamourous quality of the Bagdad of Haroun al Raschid;

active service would be heavenly after the eternal monotony of marching, marching, and also he was looking forward to renewing the friendship with Abdul Malek which had gone ahead merrily through his deputy Ben Daoud. Jacques by this time spoke the coast Arabic fluently, his thirst for knowledge was insatiable, and the opportunity of extending his acquaintance with this corner of the globe pleased him.

Morocco was still an independent kingdom nominally under the rule of its own Sultan; it had strangeness and mystery unknown to the French province of Algeria. His pleasure was a little damped by young Oldberg's alarm, but that, it appeared, was excessive; it would be possible for him to volunteer for garrison duty at one of the outlying forts and never run the risk of meeting his brother in the town; dull but safe, Jacques assured him. Walther cheered up and Jacques resolved to see this German spy for himself and to question Abdul Malek about him. His enquiries yielded a good deal of information; Walther's brother did, in fact, seem to be an exceedingly dangerous person. Jacques found himself in possession of a number of facts which would have been welcome knowledge in the Intelligence departments of several governments, but his curiosity on the subject had been on Walther's behalf and he saw no reason to report his discoveries to the authorities.

Dar el Baida, after all, was not French territory. France could do nothing to punish

local spies. The town was to all intents and purposes "no man's land," there was nothing to prevent international spying on a large scale; no one was in authority and everyone wanted to be; it was, in fact, at that time, probably the most flourishing community of international intriguers in the world. Here was a plum for somebody and every nation in Europe wanted to have a finger in the pie which held that plum.

Jacques, John Smith and Abdul Malek talked it over, laughed and did nothing. But they had noted Fritz Oldberg, while he did not even know of their existence.

Jacques enjoyed Abdul Malek's company and spent much time in it, and it was in the Moor's shop that he met another soldier of France, a *tirailleur* whose name was Jean Dubois and who served Lieutenant Louis de Belfort as orderly. Jacques pricked up his ears when he heard that name. He had personal reasons for being interested in the de Belfort family, but he did not tell his new friend so. In a nonchalant way he questioned the *tirailleur* and frequently sought his company. Dubois, indeed, was a pleasant enough fellow to be cultivated on his own account, but it was of the de Belforts that Jacques wanted him to talk. Jacques sometimes smiled a little grimly to himself; he had once been destined for the Diplomatic Service and circumstances seemed to be bringing out in him qualities which would have stood him in good stead had his father's intentions been fulfilled.

Was not the chief business of a Diplomat to

find out as much as he could and give as little as possible away? Jean Dubois was discreet and devoted to his master; Jacques' questioning was so skilfully conducted that the *tirailleur* was quite unsuspicious that he was being pumped. Not that there was anything to conceal, but he might have taken alarm and scented impertinence. So Dubois, who was a natural gossip, talked in friendly fashion of the little things and daily trivialities which Jacques wanted to know, of Mdlle. Jeanne's beauty and the charm of the little one, Lucie, of Mdme. de Belfort's pride in her son and of that son's regret that the visit of his family would so soon come to an end; already they had stayed longer than had originally been intended.

As the friendship ripened Jacques presently accompanied Dubois to the kitchen of the villa outside the town which the de Belfort family rented, and in the kitchen Jacques found Lucie. She loved him at once, she told him later, and equally swiftly Jacques fell in love with her.

Mdlle. Lucie de Belfort was six years old but inclined to be precocious. She was the constant companion of her mother and of her elder sister, Jeanne, who was eighteen. She was as dainty as a fairy, lovely and sweet tempered, and the family's rather intimate connection with England had led to their adopting for Lucie the clothes and upbringing of an English child, which an English nurse took care to foster. Jeanne had an English air and English ideas too, while sacrificing none of her French *chic*,

but Jacques, though his eyes watched for her wistfully, only saw Jeanne from afar; she did not visit the kitchen or the garden or go for "piqueniques" on donkey-back after the heat of the day as Lucie and Jacques did, properly chaperoned, of course, by Dubois and the English nurse. Lucie prattled merrily in English and Jacques was happier than he had believed he ever could be again, for Lucie sometimes spoke of his own people, though she did not know they were his, and he made no sign. Dubois was amused at this ardent love affair, but sometimes he found it necessary to chide the child for her too great frankness before a stranger: "After all, Mademoiselle Lucie," the soldier said gravely, "Jacques is not, like us, a member of the family."

Lucie turned scarlet and turned to Jacques swiftly, throwing her arms about him and hiding her face in his coat.

"It is not true, Jacques is one of the family. I love him. When I am old enough we shall be betrothed. Is it not so, Jacques?"

"With all the pleasure in the world, Lucie, if you still wish it."

"Of course I shall wish it. It is a promise?"

"It is a promise," the *légionnaire* answered gravely and turned his back on the *tirailleur* who stood laughing at his elbow.

Jacques, whose restless energy must always be employed on something, carved for the child out of wood a set of *légionnaires* with a corporal, all in correct uniform, the painting of

which caused them huge enjoyment and made a good deal of mess. Lucie was tremendously pleased with them and treasured them carefully. Treasured them, in fact, when she had left childhood behind her, and at intervals she took them out of a box and stood them in a row, six *légionnaires* and a corporal carved lovingly in wood. It was while he was carving the corporal that Jacques cut his finger. Lucie was sitting beside him watching with admiration and chattering about the latest news.

"Maman had a letter to-day from Paulette Duncombe," the child said innocently. "Why! Jacques, you have cut yourself."

"It is nothing," Jacques said hastily. "Tell me your news."

"Let me tie it up," Lucie insisted. "That is better. Paulette is to come to Dar el Baida next winter. It is not spoken of, of course, but there is a question of her being betrothed to Louis. I think they feel for each other as you and I, Jacques, but of course, being grown up, they must not say so frankly. I think it is a pity to grow up, there are so many things one may not do. It is said we shall not be here next winter. Maman desires that Jeanne goes to school in England for a year, though I think she is a little old for school, and Jeanne thinks so too. Besides she speaks English already so well. And I am to go to a convent. I am not pleased, but it appears that it is necessary. I protested, but both Maman and Louis were firm."

"And Miss Duncombe"; Jacques' head was

bent over his carving. "Where will she stay?"

"That is the absurd part of it. She says that if she is a guest she will not be able to stay long enough, so she is to be a kind of governess to Mrs. Johnson's children. Everyone is angry, but she insists. The English have so much liberty," Lucie sighed regretfully.

The *légionnaire* had finished his labour of love. With a profound bow he presented the toys to Lucie and laughed at her enthusiastic thanks. "To-morrow it is a 'piquenique' is it not?" Jacques asked. The child was clinging to him tightly, her arms close round his neck, her warm little mouth pressed against his rough brown cheek.

"Yes," she assented eagerly. "Jean and Ann and you and I. Louis has duties, Jeanne is to pay a visit and Maman prefers to stay at home. We will have a lovely time. Till to-morrow, Jacques. Thank you a thousand times for the *légionnaires*. You are kind. I love you.

But Lucie did not have her picnic. On the morrow Jacques was on his way back to Sidi bel Abbas. It was nearly twelve months before he returned to Dar el Baida and nearly fifteen years before he saw Lucie again.

Yet the scene had been set for the tragedy and the *dramatis personae* allotted their parts. Jacques was to be the hero—or if you are a stickler for law perhaps he might appear to be a villain—of the piece; the de Belforts, Jeanne

and Louis in the first act and Lucie in the epilogue, Abdul Malek, Fritz Oldberg (no doubt of his villainy) all had big parts to play. The stage was set for the appearance of Paulette Duncombe, whose coming was to alter the course of all their lives.

PART II

THE FIRST CRIME

I

OMAR the donkeyman held the bridle of the donkey with one strong hand and with the other steadied Paulette Duncombe as she sprang into her chair-backed saddle. Hamed, the ass, generally a well-behaved beast, chose that moment to raise his voice in greeting or protest, and Paulette having no desire to match her voice against his noisier effort, contented herself with waving a farewell to Mrs. Johnson, who stood in the courtyard watching her guest's employee set out for her daily ride. The cavalcade had already started to the music of Hamed's bray, so that in order to make herself heard Mrs. Johnson was compelled to step out into the cobble stone street and shout her remonstrance after the retreating figures—a very undignified proceeding for so stately a lady.

The girl heard but merely smiled and shook her head, while Omar at Hamed's head with stick upraised looked up at the rider with a grin.

"Mrs. Johnson says we shall all probably get hurt, Hamed included, and that I shall see nothing of the procession. What do you think, Omar?"

"I think the Senora says right, Senorita. There will be big crowd and very rough."

"Oh, we shall have to chance it since I said I would come," said Paulette indifferently. "Do we go through the Sok?"

"There is a more better way," he said confidently.

The donkeyman twitched Hamed's bridle and both he and his charge lifted their feet daintily as they stepped through the muddy pools of the unpaved roads in silence. Dar el Baida was still nominally a port of the Sultan of Morocco and without such expensive and interfering luxuries as health authorities and paved roads; happily for Paulette, Hamed was sure-footed and of an amiable disposition, otherwise she might have rolled into the mud; it *had* happened.

As Mrs. Johnson had prophesied, it seemed impossible to make any headway through the seething crowds round the gates of the Catholic burial ground; natives and Europeans alike had all come out to see the ceremony, and, some of them, to wander through the crowd listening for and fanning discontent. Paulette, with a coaxing smile here and there and an appealing look in her lovely blue eyes, and Omar, with stout stick raised threateningly, forced a path through the mass of onlookers, and were only

brought to a standstill at length by the ranks of French soldiers standing as rigid as hedges on either side of the narrow road down which the procession must ride from the camp.

Paulette leant over her saddle and touched one of the guard on the shoulder.

"Shall I be able to see anything from here, Jean?"

The *tirailleur* managed to smile at her without turning his head.

"Of a surety, ma'moiselle. But you should not have ventured through that *canaille*."

The girl laughed.

"A soldier's daughter and a soldier's fiancée, Jean? Besides, Omar and I always go where we choose. Is Monsieur Louis riding with the cortége?"

Louis de Belfort's orderly, remembering discipline, replied hastily and became once more a statue, while Paulette Duncombe sat patiently looking over the heads of the restless people and listening idly to the cross-current of talk in bastard Arabic and half a dozen European tongues, in Shellah by the hillmen and Arabic-Yiddish by the Jews, a medley of tongues which inevitably suggested the Tower of Babel. On the other side of the soldiers' guard of honour she saw the German, Fritz Oldberg, wandering with apparent lack of interest from group to group and exchanging a few words of greeting, as it appeared, with Moors, Europeans, Berbers and Jews alike. Paulette frowned suddenly. She disliked Fritz Oldberg intensely, but not

until that moment had she realized him as a man to be feared as well. A little shiver of discomfort ran down her spine! "Someone walking over my grave," as Nurse would have said, she murmured to herself. An Englishwoman in a tweed costume and unsuitable foot-gear, armed with a camera and with field-glasses slung over her shoulder, pressed through the crowd and rested her hand on the girl's saddle.

"Excuse me," she said with a frank smile, "but I heard you speak English, and as I'm only a tourist landed for the day from the coast steamer, I should be extremely grateful if you would tell me what all this excitement is about?"

Paulette bowed gravely.

"It is the funeral of Lieutenant Dufour, madame. He, with three soldiers, was ambushed and murdered by the Zaers—rebel tribesmen, you know—some days ago. This unusual pomp and circumstance is to show the natives that France honoured and will avenge her soldiers. There will be a punitive expedition and more lives sacrificed. Still rebellion and insult must be punished. Look! the procession is coming. If you would move to the other side and stand next to Omar, my man, you will be able to see better."

France was indeed making a demonstration. The troops seemed the incarnation of the tricolor, a thousand tones and variations engendered by the sun and a dozen campaigns but always and everywhere the red, white

and blue. The cavalry came first: Chasseurs d'Afrique in white képis, blue tunics and red breeches, mounted on spirited grey barbs whose restless prancing in the narrow path seriously endangered the safety of the herded spectators, Spahis, like magnificent bronze statues in red jackets with blue baggy Turkish trousers, wide blue cloaks and imperturbable hawklike faces framed picturesquely in floating white veils, and alert Goumiers, with red, tightly-drawn headware and blue and white burnouses, sitting their horses as if carved out of one piece with them.

The crowd drew back muttering, out of reach of the mad hoofs of the rearing, curveting horses, but pressed forward again to eye curiously the coffin, crowned with the képi and discarded sword of the dead soldier through whose person an insult had been aimed at France.

Behind the coffin marched the infantry: the Foreign Legion in linen covered képis, loose trousers which once were white, and long blue coats, tarnished and stained with the dust of a desert campaign, which were buttoned back at both sides so that they looked like elongated swallow-tails, Zouaves in blue, scarlet and white, and the cheerful Algerian *tirailleurs,* whose clothing was a recognisable white with jaunty red tarbush and wide kummerbund of scarlet.

For half a mile the cortége, preceded and followed by military bands, wound down the

dusty lane and through the guarded gate of the cemetery amid a muttering silence. As the last *tirailleur* passed through the gates were closed and the crowd settled down to wait patiently until they opened again. In the parade Paulette had seen her lover, Louis de Belfort, splendid in azure and silver, sitting like a centaur on his magnificent black mare. Emotion choked her for a second, grief for the dead man who had been a friend and fear for her own man which seemed stalking towards her out of the future.

She turned to her neighbour with a sigh.

"It is impressive, madame, but how sad to die like this, so young, and be buried in a strange land." Then she added with a faint smile, "I must go, but if I can be of service to you this afternoon I shall be delighted. If you need a guide? There are no street names or house numbers, but anyone in the town will tell you where to find Paulette Duncombe and the house of Mrs. Johnson."

One of the *légionnaires* in the guard turned his head quickly with a startled expression on his face and looked fixedly at the girl, but she was leaning down to speak to her new acquaintance and too engrossed to notice the hungry stare.

Bending forward she spoke softly to the *tirailleur*:

"Jean, tell Monsieur Louis I shall hope to see him this evening."

Omar dexterously piloted donkey and rider

through the surging mass of people by liberal use of highly spiced invective and his pliant stick. But once clear of the crowd he walked in silence, biting his stick thoughtfully and regarding Paulette protectively out of the corner of his eye. Something evidently was troubling him, but the girl did not notice. Paulette would have been surprised had she known of the depth of devotion which her donkey boy bestowed upon her; even more surprised had she had any suspicion of the nature of the boy himself. She gave him the same careless liking and kindness which she displayed towards Hamed, his charge; he was a good boy, intelligent and trustworthy, she would have said if questioned, but beyond that she did not give him a thought. But unlike the usual run of half breeds, Omar the donkey boy had inherited the good, not the evil, qualities of both races from which he drew his blood; he had the pride and courage of his Arab father and the good humour and fidelity of his negro mother. Omar was her guard and watch dog, prepared to defend her to the death, but Paulette did not know. His eyes as he watched her now were doglike in their devotion, but he knew she would pay no heed if he warned her. Paulette rode with a deep furrow on her brow.

"I'm afraid, Omar, this is not the end of it. There will be punishment," she said at length, and Omar nodded his head slowly in agreement, but refrained from enlarging on the grim idea, as he was, no doubt, able to do. The girl's

anxiety, as he knew very well, was for her lover, not for herself, and Omar's devotion was for the individual, not for the invading French. He would not care a *sou* if all the French were wiped into the sea by the rebel tribesmen, but he would murder with cheerfullness and passion anyone who dared to touch a hair of his mistress's golden head, and he knew—who better—that she had an enemy, unscrupulous and cruel.

II

The heavy African rain falling with monotonous regularity on the palms and banana trees which rustled beneath her window woke Paulette soon after midnight. The sun, she knew, would probably rout the rain soon after dawn but the patter against the closed "jalousies" would keep her awake in the meantime and provide the opportunity for thought for which a busy life gave so little chance. She lay still under the net curtains and to the mingled strain of the thudding raindrops and shrill tropical song of the mosquitoes, who beat unavailingly against the enshrouding net, came to various decisions.

She had been in Morocco for over four months now and loved it. It was new, picturesque and exciting and, more than was seemly in a good British citizen, she adored the sunshine. She would be quite content to spend the rest of her life in North Africa—with Louis. The trials of the womenfolk of the French Colonial Army

worried her not at all; she was a soldier's daughter and thought nothing of physical discomfort. It was not physical discomfort which was keeping her awake listening to the heavy raindrops now, but unease of another kind.

Her position as governess in the house of the Johnsons, prosperous traders of sound standing in the English colony of Dar el Baida, suited her very well on the whole but it had very real disadvantages. She had accepted the post—almost a nominal one as regards work—in order to escape from an intolerable position at home, to indulge an inherited craving to hear and to see some new thing and, most of all, of course—to be near Louis de Belfort. She did not intend to go home again; her father's annoyance with her had taken the very uncomfortable expression of depriving her of funds until she should come to her sense and obey him (the fatuous man refused to listen to all who told him—his inner consciousness included—that in that case he might wait forever); her pride would not allow her to stay indefinitely with friends who would have been only too pleased to receive her. Altogether the idea of taking a post had seemed to her the simplest way out of the difficulty. The duties were not arduous, and Mrs. Johnson had too great a sense of her own good fortune in securing Colonel Duncombe's daughter as companion and governess as well as too kind a heart to be anything but pleasant and considerate. The truth

of the matter—and Paulette frankly acknowledged it to herself—was that Miss Duncombe possessed too imperious a disposition to occupy a subordinate position in such society. There was an abundance of quiet gaiety from which the Johnson's governess was excluded, and as a high spirited and beautiful young woman used to a great deal of homage she objected.

Colonel Sir Henry Duncombe was a personage, and the fact that he was extremely wealthy as well did nothing to diminish the honour in which he and his family were held. Paulette had been spoilt, although her own charm and good temper and generosity of heart had gone a long way to counteract the ill effects of too much adulation. Still, to be constantly snubbed as a nobody by people whom she considered of no consequence was more than her pride could endure. It was all very well to be the intimate friend of Colonel Dangin's wife and to be welcome at all times in the houses of the French military families, but circumstances forbade her to accept invitations from which her employer was excluded. From the English colony, composed of commercial families of long residence and considerable wealth, among whom Mrs. Johnson occupied a position second only to that of the wife of the British Consul, the girl received a condescending civility which rather amused her. The attitude of the Germans, however, was too exasperating to bear. It was sufficiently trying to be pestered with the unwelcome and rather insulting attentions of

Herr Fritz Oldberg, without being lectured and snubbed by that gentleman's ill-bred mamma and the whole lamb-like Teuton community which revolved round her. With the exception of flaxen-haired, invertebrate little Elsa Oldberg, Paulette found the whole German colony insupportably snobbish, vulgar and generally objectionable, yet the Germans were so numerous and so important a section of the European community that it was impossible to ignore them.

She, Paulette, might be snobbish herself, she owned, but the result of her review of the situation was a determination to ask Mrs. Johnson to release her from her engagement as governess and to allow her to stay on as guest, paying of course. "That will be much more satisfactory," she murmured, snapping wildly at a pertinacious mosquito, "and I'll jolly well let these hateful Germans know who I am if I can only extract some funds from father. Surely he must have realised by this time that I can be as obstinate as he can and that nothing on earth will induce me to marry that silly ass Reggie even if he has got a title and a large bank balance. I suppose he wants to wipe out the memory of disgrace, poor old dear, but he won't by throwing his only daughter to the lions. As to publishing the news of my engagement to Louis, I think it would be wiser on the whole, since the de Belforts are pleased. It will be nicer for Mrs. Johnson in the long run than letting her suffer from the

pricks of malicious gossip administered by those old cats. Heaven alone knows what scandal is going about. I do think that European colonies in foreign lands and away from wholesome occupations are the most detestable institutions and hotbeds of hatred, malice and all uncharitableness. I'll talk to Louis to-day."

At six o'clock she rose, saddled her mare with Omar's help and, followed by her faithful guardian, went for a gallop across the sands to the west of the town. In wet weather in those days the roads and market place of Dar el Baida very much resembled thick soup, but the sand, draining quickly, was the favourite haunt of early morning riders prevented by the heat from taking exercise later in the day. Paulette greeted many friends cheerfully and had the satisfaction of pretending not to see Fritz Oldberg when he tried to overtake her. Paulette was a magnificnt horsewoman and her mare could outpace any other in the town. Fritz Oldberg looked foolish, and Paulette chuckled, but Omar, panting in her wake, looked grave. She returned towards the town to breakfast an hour later, flushed and fresh in spite of her almost sleepless night, and saw Dar el Baida rise like delicate white shell splashed with pink and gold and glistening in the morning sun, looking like a fairy city instead of its drab and sordid self. An Irish-French parentage made her emotional. She was young, very much in love, and filled with joy at being alive at all on this glorious March morning, and her

disposition was wilful and imperious; it was small wonder that Frau Oldberg disapproved of her son's infatuation for this "so un-Teutonic Miss."

She found two notes by her plate at the breakfast table and read them thoughtfully, mentally readjusting the hour of the necessary talk with Mrs. Johnson. The latter assented cordially to the girl's request that she might be allowed to take *déjeuner* with Madame Dangin and postpone the children's lessons for an hour. "I can be back by 3 o'clock to give Tommy his arithmetic lesson," she said apologetically. "Madame Dangin says she particularly wants to see me, but only if you can spare me, of course."

Mrs. Johnson generously repressed any annoyance she may have felt that her governess should be welcome in society which only accorded a courteous toleration to herself.

"Go by all means, my dear," she said smilingly. "I am very glad that you should enjoy yourself at these informal parties. It is a great pity that all big official entertainments happen to be out of the question this year because of the English mourning for King Edward, and the French because of those soldiers who were murdered by the rebels. We generally have a lot of gaiety in the winter, but official mourning makes such a difference. Perhaps if the Sultan pays his promised visit to the coast this spring there will be some native festivities which will interest you."

"I should love that," said Paulette with interest. "Is there any chance of his coming here?"

"I have not heard so," Mrs. Johnson confessed. "But he was to go to Tangier and Rabat in March if the rebels permitted."

"I should not imagine they would permit," Paulette said seriously. "They will not be quieter until they have been thoroughly punished for Lieutenant Dufour's murder, and there may be some serious fighting before they have learnt the lesson that they cannot kill French citizens with impunity."

"When is the punitive expedition starting, do you know?"

"I have not heard," answered Paulette briefly.

Omar met her outside the door.

"The Senorita will have to take Hamed," he announced. "The mud is too bad for the mare."

Paulette nodded. "I shall be ready at 11 o'clock, Omar," she said as she passed to the school room and the waiting Tommy.

By 11 o'clock the March sun was beating fiercely on the rivers of mud which shared the name of roads with the cobbled thoroughfares of the older part of the town. Paulette, something of a salamander, took the more exposed but shorter route to the camp, and rode tranquilly through the noise and filth of the Sok—mud and flies, mud and flies, and hot sunshine which later in the day would change it into

dust and flies and intolerable smells. The girl after nearly five months of it eyed the scene with sleepy indifference, while Omar and Hamed, having been born in it, probably preferred it to anything else.

Omar, with picturesque abusiveness, thrust and pushed his way through the crowds, hitting out indiscriminately at dirty humanity, sore-eyed over-burdened donkeys and vicious camels. "Balak, Balak," was the universal cry which nobody heeded. Violent exercise always made the usually silent Omar more communicative.

"The roads will soon be done," he remarked, "and the typhus is more better."

"And what about typhoid?" Paulette asked grimly. "It would serve the French authorities right if it were much worse. The idea of digging up the main streets of a town which has done without any drains for hundreds of years without taking any precautions to move the population to a place of safety. I'm surprised any of us are alive at all. Typhus, typhoid and small-pox in practically every house."

This was beyond Omar and he was silent about so senseless a proceeding. Drainage evidently was a silly fad of the Roumi to which good Moslems had to submit if they wanted to make good profits out of the foreigner.

Jean, Louis de Belfort's soldier servant, met them a hundred yards from the camp and took Hamed's bridle from the reluctant Omar. The Moor knew that the fair haired Roumia was

about to take, as was fitting, a husband. He had long ago recovered from the first shock of seeing the infidel women walk abroad with their faces unveiled and he had nothing against the Frenchman whom she had chosen, but he had no faith in the ability of anyone but himself to take care of Paulette. The infidels, to Omar's mind, were all fools. Danger threatened them on every side and instead of preparing to meet it they played tennis and danced and generally behaved as if they were "afflicted of Allah." He looked sourly at Jean as he turned to trudge back through the mud, but the girl greeted the French soldier with a smile.

"Is Monsieur Louis ready, Jean?" she asked.

"Monsieur le capitaine awaits Ma'moiselle."

The French force whose base was the town of Dar el Baida numbered at that time approximately 11,000 men, mainly composed of Algerians but leavened with Frenchmen and a Senegalese battalion. The protection of the southern wall of the town was left to the Spanish who shared according to the terms of the Act of Algerciras, the task of policing the coast towns. The French camp lay to the north, on the road to Mediouna, twelve miles distant and the furthest point inland to which unprotected travelers' safety could be guaranteed. Beyond that the country was lawless, infested with rebels and wandering bands of maurauders.

Solitary travellers could be fairly certain of being set upon and robbed (if not murdered or

held to ransom) under conditions to which death seemed preferable. To an English girl, used to peace time soldiers housed in solid barracks and mainly visible to civilians when they were on parade, the camp of an army on active service was interesting and unusual. It was connected with the Waterport by a Decauville railway on which the trucks were pushed by perspiring men, and consisted of huts about 45 metres long constructed by the maid-of-all-work *légionnaires*. They were built on tarred piles of planks placed horizontally to the uprights and had high, broad galvanised iron roofs. England was to see them in their hundreds a year or two later, but to Paulette they were altogether new. In front stretched wide balconies, shaded by the eaves and running all the way down the entrance side of the buildings; creepers and climbing pink geraniums straggled artistically over them. Paulette, although she was growing accustomed to their queerness, was struck afresh by their quaint resemblance to English bathing machines wreathed rakishly with garlands of wild flowers.

Within the camp was movement, life and colour. Many an officer and "poilu" saluted the girl smilingly as an old friend and she would have greeted them had not Louis been waiting. Jean fell back discreetly and she took the road behind the camp which led back windingly to the town.

"I hope you did not mind coming up here, *ma bien-aimée*?" he said apologetically. "I

am going to Madame Dangin's as well, but I was so much afraid I should not get a word with you and I have news."

The girl looked up with shining, inquiring eyes. "Leave, perhaps, and that much delayed wedding," her heart whispered.

Louis went on: "First, my dearest, I want your permission to publish the news of our engagement."

"I meant to ask you to-day to do so," she said softly.

All the world seemed empty, and the dusty aloes would tell no tales, so they sealed that arrangement suitably, in spite of this glorious raiment of cerulean and silver and the open stretch of the broad highway.

"My news, beloved, I fear you will not like although it is hardly unexpected. We are under orders to join the punitive expedition to avenge poor Dufour and bring the murderers to justice since the Commander of the Faithful seems quite incapable of doing his own dirty work. I fear it will be a long job, for all the tribes are in revolt from Fez to the coast and we start almost at once."

Paulette's lips trembled. This was far indeed from her dreams, but "Oh, Louis," was all she said.

Louis, disappointed as she, tried to comfort her; he stooped to look into the downcast face that was dearer to him than anything in the world. "Afterwards there will be leave, beloved," he whispered, and did not know his

happiness that he could not see into the blackness of the future.

III

Authentic news travelled from Fez to Tangier by courier, thence by wireless to Europe and reached the general public of Dar el Baida by French or English newspapers on the lucky days on which a steamer called at the port and was able to communicate with the shore—a roundabout route which sometimes took eight days. The French camp, connected with Tangier by telegraph, was better informed but tied about with the red tape of officialdom, so that all through March Dar el Baida was full of rumours; probable rumours amounting almost to official communications by coast courier from Tangier, and rumours, wild, improbable and eventually proved true which circulated in the Sok, practically coincidentally with the events happening many leagues away which they recorded.

There were no telegraphs, wireless or otherwise, no telephones, no posts, no trains, no made roads even, connecting Fez with Dar el Baida, and yet the Sok was posted punctually with news about affairs of which the foreign officials knew nothing. Exactly how the natives conveyed their information remained a mystery, although an ingenious system, in which the obscuring and flaring of fire played a chief

part, was known to exist, and there was the constant thudding of little earthen drums which told news afar off. But this conveyance of news without visible means is still one of the hidden things of Africa which the white man cannot completely fathom.

Paulette Duncombe, who had effected her change of status in Mrs. Johnson's household, and whose engagement had been announced to intimate friends, was kept informed by her lover; Omar, too, retailed such scraps of news from the Sok as he thought politic.

Mulai Hafid's glib promises to punish the murderers of the dead lieutenant had had no result beyond raising a hornet's nest about his own ears. At the beginning of March the Zaer tribe, the actual offenders, were in open revolt, not only against the French invaders but against the Commander of the Faithful, and the Grand Vizier embarked on an enjoyable series of wholesale extortions from all suspects such as he had not secured for a long time. To the demand of a powerful body of Sheikhs that the Grand Vizier should be dismissed the Sultan turned a deaf ear; "better a whole kingdom enraged—at a distance—than an angry wasp on the steps of his throne" must have been his reflection. On March 7th, a whisper floated through the Sok that all the tribes round the northern capital were in revolt and that disaster had overtaken two of the Sultan's "mehallas." On March 12th, all Islam was *en fête* to celebrate the birthday of the

Prophet Mohammed—the Feast of Mulud, the most lively festival of the year. The beating of the earthen drums, the twang of the *guimbri* and the clap of innumerable new saffron *babuches* beneath the gleaming holiday raiment of many colours filled Dar el Baida from dawn to dusk and lingered long hours afterwards, but from Fez came the sinister whisper that the Commander of the Faithful was besieged in his capital and unable to hold the customary ceremonies outside the walls, a break in the established order of things which had not occurred for nearly ninety years.

Over in Europe the rulers of the Great Powers acknowledged that the situation, politically speaking, was very serious and did nothing, but in Dar el Baida and throughout El Maghreb Europeans walked gravely; they had had too much experience of native revolts to view the affair from its chilly political standpoint. Human lives, many thousands of them probably, might be sacrificed in a massacre before Europe would give France the word to move. She was afraid to move without the word, for she had two opponents, one open and the other veiled, sinister, with her hand behind her back. All through March, the relations between Spain and France were very strained, but Spain made no secret of her jealousy and put it aside to help when the need arose. England raised no difficulty; but what of Germany?

Louis de Belfort, fiercely Germanophobe, put the question to Paulette on the 15th March

as they took their evening ride along the road to Mediouna with the endless green prairie of the Chaouiya on either side of them. Behind them Dar el Baida glittered like a monstrous opaque shell beside the surf of a sapphire sea. Sometimes they left the road and were almost buried in the lush vegetation, belts of mallow six feet high, wild mustard and giant clover, flax and chicory, mammoth fennel and pink valerian among the palmetto scrub, golden French marigolds and crimson poppies, asphodel and myriads of the many shaded purple iris, intermixed with acres of rustling barley and oats.

Paulette who was a great reader of romances had been at first sight a little disappointed with Morocco. Where was the desert and where was the endless waste of trackless sand? Where were the great racing camels and the romantic, if dirty, Bedouins? This was surely the most fertile land on earth and there was water in abundance, rivers and fish? "The desert was beyond the Atlas Mountains" Louis had told her and had suggested a honeymoon in the "Garden of Allah" when a honeymoon became a practical affair. Paulette was content with that. Her first disappointment had gone long ago and she loved El Maghreb for its fruitfulness. A little breathless now from her ride through the tangle she reigned her mare and looked back.

"This is a lovely country, Louis; a lovely country. What we could make of it."

"Who is 'we'?" he asked smilingly.

Paulette laughed.

"The English, of course. But cheer up, Louis, the French are next best if only they can get a free hand."

"They will have to fight for it," he answered a little grimly. "Germany plays a lone hand, but it is a strong one.

"Do you really think she will make trouble?" Paulette asked.

"I'm sure of it. She will put every possible spoke into the wheel of France and by the time we are able to move the opportunity will be lost."

"But, Louis, what of Fez?"

"There will probably be a massacre," he said shortly. "Punishment to follow. They will have to learn to be forcible before the event instead of after."

Paulette turned startled eyes on him and hesitated a moment before she said slowly: "I have uncomfortable news for you, Louis. Jeanne is in Fez."

Louis wheeled his mare so quickly that she was forced back on her haunches.

"*Mon dieu!* Jeanne in Fez. I thought she was in Oran."

"So did I. I had a letter this morning. Omar brought it from a beggar in the Sok who was asking for me. She does not say how or when she reached there. Simply that she is helping the Mission ladies at Fez, that she is all right and sends her love to you. What can be done?"

Louis groaned.

"*Ma pauvre petite soeur.* Nothing can be done. Fez is a beleagured city; no one can openly get either in or out it seems. It is the story of the mouse and the trap, Paulette. If there is a massacre as most people expect . . . . Perhaps, and we will hope so, they will contrive to send away the women and children before things get too bad. We must return, my dearest; it will soon be dark and even as near the town as this it is hardly safe after dusk. Thank God you are not in danger too."

IV

In those days of uncertainty everyone went about with eyes and ears strained, on the alert for the news which often reached the town from the most unexpected quarters. In the town itself, too, intrigue wound its subterranean course and threw up sudden bubbles of excitement which were not unnoted. Mrs. Johnson's house stood in the heart of the town, between the English and Spanish Consulates and Paulette made a morning pilgrimage to the roof-tops as soon as she arose, with a vague patriotic idea that everything helpful must come from over the water, and gazed seaward to where the long Atlantic rollers slipped with deceptive gentleness up to the sandy coast. Sometimes a small steamer lay at anchor a mile or so from the shore, but generally the roadstead was empty

and no curl of smoke broke the harmony of the morning's gold and blue.

About 6:30 a.m. on March 17th, Paulette climbed the ladder which mounted dizzily to the topmost terrace whence she could obtain a clear view uninterrupted by the lower roof-tops of the neighbouring houses. Far below in the courtyard she could see Omar busy grooming her mare in readiness for the morning ride. No one else in the house was stirring and her eyes noted idly the unusual emptiness of the streets as she glanced over them before turning her gaze seaward. Then she started and curved her hand above her eyes to see better. In the open roadstead a small warship rode at anchor —a gunboat, she estimated swiftly with the knowledge born of long residence in garrisoned seaports.

It was impossible from that distance to make anything of the flag at its mast, but she could see it was not the "tricolor," nor was the ship the little *Friant* which frequently made sudden descents on the port for visits of inspection, and indeed, even as she was gazing fixedly and trying to decide the nationality of the visitor, a second warship, which she had no difficulty in recognizing as the *Friant* herself, rounded the point and anchored at some distance from the stranger.

Paulette ran down the swaying ladder at a dangerous speed and urged Omar into uncongenial speed.

"Quick, quick, Omar. I want to go to the

Waterport and find out what is happening. There are two warships off the town and perhaps one of them is English, though I do not think so."

All the town seemed to be assembled at the Waterport, representatives of the Consular services of Great Britain, France and Spain, traders of a dozen nationalities, custom officials, French officers, ladies in riding habits, Jews and natives by the hundred. No one had any reliable knowledge but all were excited, even the phlegmatic Moors seemed stirred by unusual animation. The general impression seemed to be that the stranger was a German and that the *Friant* was keeping her under surveillance for good and sufficient reasons. Could it be the possibility of the War about which everyone had been talking for so long. Was Germany ready for her quarrel with France? Would the situation in Morocco provide the excuse she was seeking for the sudden opening of hostilities? If Germany were determined to upset the peace of Europe the proposed partition of Morocco would provide as good an excuse as any other. The French officers looked grave.

Omar had been distrustful of warships since the bombardment of Dar el Baida by the French in 1907, so Paulette left him with the horses and made her way through the crowd on foot till she found herself at the elbow of one of the clerks of the British Consulate.

"Can you tell me what it is all about, Mr. White?" she asked.

"We are not sure, Miss Duncombe, but believe she is a German gunboat."

"What is she doing here?"

"That is just what we should all like to know," he said with a smile. "Nominally she has come on a friendly visit, I hear them say, but as she has come without an invitation and nobody except her compatriots here feel in the least pleased to see her, I think there is something behind it. It has been rumoured that she has orders to make a sudden descent upon the port of Agadir, on the Atlantic coast, you know, to embarrass the French and stir up trouble among the Trans-atlantic tribes, but no one knows what Germany is up to these days. Her actions, however friendly in appearance, always seem suspicious. At all events a French destroyer has been trailing her for some days and has just followed her in. In fact, the Frenchmen sent a boat ashore some time ago. Nothing seems going to happen for the moment at any rate, so I for one am going back to breakfast."

The move from the Waterport was becoming general and Paulette rode back thoughtfully through the town. If France and Germany really were to go to war?

Mrs. Johnson had heard nothing of the excitement and was pleasurably thrilled: "How very jolly," she said happily. "I wonder how long she will stay. The Germans will probably give a dance at the Club and you will be able to dance with your fascinating naval officers."

"Mine?" cried Paulette indignantly. "They're Germans."

"Oh, I forgot you did not like them," Mrs. Johnson apologised. "But I have always heard that sailors are the same dear creatures whatever their nationality.

In spite of her abdication of the throne of authority Paulette gave Tommy his lessons still and found she liked it much better since it was no longer compulsory. Tommy enjoyed it better too, and the lessons progressed famously. Mrs. Johnson devoted herself in the forenoon to household affairs and Ali, the houseboy, did the marketing before breakfast, so that no news was brought to the house during the morning. At noon, however, in spite of the sun, Paulette and Hamed paid a visit to Madame Dangin, who was discovered in a state of acute indignation.

"Such impudence, my dear. To come without warning and without invitation and expect to be entertained cordially. Germany may claim the right to investigate but it is a gross impertinence. The coast towns are under the charge of France and Spain and all others must come only with permission. The English would not show so gross a lack of taste. I hear they are giving a dance at the Club. No subject of France will be there."

Paulette laughed at the vehemence, but she saw the awkwardness of the position. The members of the different nationalities, never on very cordial terms with each other, had

thought it wise during the last few disquieting days, when rumours of wars and international negotiations of great delicacy were afloat, to keep entirely apart; yet here was Germany, the least popular of all, proposing, with her usual want of tact, to entertain officially and on a large scale and seemingly scattering invitations broadcast. It seemed equally unwise to go and to stay away. Paulette tried to soothe her angry friend and then returned to the town on foot sending Omar to the camp with a message to Louis.

As a chance—or perchance it was design—would have it Paulette met Fritz Oldberg as she entered the outskirts of the town.

"My good fortune does not desert me," he said with the stiff wooden bow which the English girl so much disliked. "I have just been to beg the excellent Mrs. Johnson to attend the ball we are giving to-night at the Club for our naval compatriots who are here on a short visit. She said she would be charmed but could not answer for you. So I left the invitation with her and came this way on the chance of meeting you so that I might add my entreaties."

Paulette was embarrassed. She wanted to hear what Louis had to say first and Fritz Oldberg was apparently possessed of an impenetrable skin. She temporized. "I must wait until I have consulted Mrs. Johnson, Herr Oldberg. I am her guest, you know."

"But she accepted," Oldberg shouted angrily.

"Only for herself," Paulette smiled, and would give no promise. Yet the girl's feeling of discomfort in the company of this German admirer of hers grew in intensity every time she was forced to touch his hand. There was something implacable about him, an assured sense of force in reserve if suavity failed. She felt a little as the rabbit feels when hypnotised by the snake. She hated him and feared him, but her greatest fear was for Louis, not for herself.

Louis' reply to her message was sufficiently disturbing.

"Go to the dance, beloved, and tell me all about it to-morrow and *watch*. It should be excessively droll. All the English will go I expect. Why not? Germany is not your hereditary enemy. For us, I think there will be no French citizens present. The civilians prefer to stay away and the General has commanded the officials to stay away with the excellent excuse 'Official Mourning.' "

If there were risk of trouble such an answer was not conciliatory. A nation does not remain in mourning for a comparatively humble individual for more than two months.

Mrs. Johnson held an assured position in the town, being wealthy and having lived there longer than anyone else. She was, besides, extremely good-natured and completely indifferent to political squabbles, so that she enjoyed an equal degree of popularity among

all the opposed sections of the community. Even the acid Frau Oldberg liked her.

Her invitation to the dance was one of the first to be issued but Paulette was not included in it. She owed her invitation entirely to the machinations of Herr Oldberg, in defiance of his mamma, as the awed and tactless Elsa presently revealed to her. Elsa, the model German daughter and sister, thought her menfolk wonderful and wise and could not understand at all why Paulette showed so little enthusiasm at the attentions of the so-marvellous Fritz. Paulette was angry enough at the moment to refuse to go at all, but calmer counsels prevailed; she was fond of Elsa and Elsa was eagerly and admiringly waiting to be shown her friend's frock. Paulette viciously shook out the folds of a white and silver confection which was totally unsuitable for a governess, as Frau Oldberg remarked tartly, but was eminently becoming to Miss Duncombe.

All the afternoon Paulette poured out tea for a constant stream of visitors who arrived for consultation and discussion in Mrs. Johnson's cool drawing-room, and, listening to scraps of conversation which floated over to her, she recovered her sense of humour and was glad that temper had not swamped curiosity. This entertainment would be something unique. It would be like dancing on the edge of a volcano which was showing signs of imminent eruption.

V

The Club was the centre of social life to the Europeans resident in the town, although the building itself and its appointments might seem rather primitive to an habitue of "The Rag." Here, in a house built in the old Moorish style with glass roofed cloister and gay with coloured tiles, the news of the day was discussed in most of the tongues of Babel. In one respect, however, its exclusive character was maintained almost as jealously as that of "The Rag" itself; its members might speak any language under the sun—and some which one might be excused for saying that they "were not"—and be totally unable to understand one another; they might be of any grade in the social scale from impeccable Consuls with the prestige—almost—of Ambassadors, to notorious swindlers unpopular in less catholic communities, but they must be *male*. Therefore the rare privilege of taking tea within its cloistered precincts or dancing on its sacred floors was one much prized by the feminine members of the community.

Paulette had never before crossed its threshold when—with gauzy skirts lifted high above the dust of the unswept street—she entered the ballroom modestly in the wake of Mrs. Johnson and looked about her. The long, wide hall was flanked by a reading-room, card-room, and various mysterious offices, in one of which refreshments were spread and served

by noiseless Moorish servants in robes of spotless white. The Johnson party arrived rather late, and Paulette surveyed the somewhat overcrowded room with a faintly ironical smile. Every Teuton resident in the town seemed to be there, racial feeing outweighing class distinction. To Paulette's prejudiced eyes they seemed a vulgar, clumsy and ill-dressed throng in spite of the air of festive animation and elaborate raiment. The German naval officers were clustered together in one corner surrounded by a mob of admiring and guttural compatriots, whose attentions, if the truth were visible, appeared to weary the heroes of the evening.

The English colony was well represented, wearing the mask of good-humoured toleration of an inferior race which so greatly endears the Englishman abroad to his hosts and fellow-travellers. But behind his stolid front of good-humoured indifference to politics and the petty quarrels of other nations more than one shrewd Englishman there had an uneasy suspicion of all things Teuton, born of bitter experience in small but significant transactions. If Germany challenged France they had no doubt of which side England must take in the quarrel, but in the meantime they kept a perilous equipoise on the metaphorical tightrope which stretched across the abyss between the two. This is the English way. "Perfidious Albion" which refuses to meet trouble halfway. If the Englishwomen who were their wives and daughters were not noteworthy in elegance or

intellect, they at least refrained from exhibitions of bad taste.

There were besides handfuls of Spaniards, Portuguese and Dutch among the company, and Paulette was disappointed to see that the French boycott was not as complete as she could have wished. None of the army people were present, however, and no civilians of note.

Paulette had a definite object in being present, and she was quite prepared to spend an evening empty of amusement, in spite of the fact that she was wearing the prettiest frock there, which must be gratifying to any young woman who has submitted to a good many snubs. Her expectations of boredom seemed in a fair way to be fulfilled; none of her particular friends were there except the gentle insipid Elsa; no one could dance decently, in her opinion, except the English Vice-consul who, being a bachelor, suffered from an overgreat popularity which his disposition was unable to assimilate properly; and last, but by no means least, Herr Fritz Oldberg was determined to make her conspicuous. Nothing short of a public insult would make him leave her alone and she was afraid to try the effect of that in case he should strike at her through Louis. She was glad to escape from him at last and take refuge under the ample shadow of her hostess who was deep in conversation with a voluble contemporary. The girl, deeply regretting the waste of an evening which might have been spent with Louis, shut her eyes and rested her

head wearily against the wall behind her. There was not going to be a volcanic eruption to-night at any rate she thought.

Now the Club, as has been said, was a Moorish building, innocent, for the most part, of doors. The main hall was divided from the aisles on either side by a chain of horseshoe arches, some of them fitted with recently added doors, but most of them merely screened with curtains. The spacious alcoves thus formed gave a measure of privacy. Mrs. Johnson seated in the corner could have heard nothing of the whispered conversations behind the curtains of either alcove in her neighborhood even if she had listened attentively, which she did not, being deep in most engrossing gossip, but Paulette, seated between two of the curtained arches in the shadow of a pillar and possessed of an unusually acute sense of hearing, could not help catching fragments of the talk which was going on in both. She had no intention of eavesdropping, being too tired to put together the fragments of what she heard, so that at first the noise was no more to her than the washing of the sea against the beach; indeed it is probable that neither of the speakers would have lowered their voices had they known she was there, for they spoke respectively in Moorish and in German of matters in which a woman naturally took no interest even if, as seemed unlikely, she knew any language but her own.

As it happened, the woman in the case had a natural aptitude for foreign tongues and knew

German well, although, as she protested truly, she could hardly speak it at all. Her knowledge of Moorish was more limited, but she knew enough to flush uncomfortably at the comments made contemptuously by the native servants behind the curtains on the unveiled shoulders of the infidel women. Her discomfort gave place to interest as she caught the word Fez. For a moment or two she could make nothing of the talk, then she gathered that the natives were speculating with cynical indifference on the probable fall of the capital and the not improbable fate of the handful of Nazarenes within her walls.

"The Commander of the Faithful has not done wisely," said one. "It is not well that the dog, El Glawi, should oppress the True Believers."

"But to-day the M'Tir were to sign an agreement with the Assisted of Allah," objected the second.

"They will sign but they will not keep the agreement," replied the other, an old soldier evidently. "I, who tell you, know. They will sack the town, and the Mellah of Fez is very rich," he added regretfully, as one who misses a sumptuous banquet.

"And the French?"

"They will fall into the trap which is prepared if Allah wills. The Germans have sent much money to the tribes."

"If the infidels quarrel with each other then is the time for the Faithful to grow rich,"

laughed the other. He lowered his voice so that Paulette, striving to hear what was said could only catch the words "the fair-haired Roumia as she rides outside the town."

This was intriguing: "Which fair-haired Roumia and what significance attached to her riding outside the town?" She did not associate the words with herself but she pondered over the snatches of conversation she had heard. There was nothing new except perhaps the threatened treachery of the M'Tir, but the fate of Fez seemed sealed, a horrible fate, and Jeanne de Belfort was there.

In the further alcove a guttural German voice had been booming loudly for some moments before it reached her ears.

"Listening, nonsense," she heard at last, and the curtain was pulled aside gently and a head pushed cautiously out. "Nothing but women, my friend. Talking as always and paying no attention to anything but lovers and clothes. Besides, who of these English fools knows German?" The other voice was lower and Paulette could not guess to whom it belonged, but the booming voice, she was sure, belonged to the captain of the gunboat.

"The French are not such fools as the English anyway," the great voice went on. "Official mourning be damned. Whoever heard of official mourning during more than two months for an unimportant lieutenant who is stupid enough to run his head into a trap. There is no place for imbeciles in the German Army.

This punishment of murderers is only an excuse. France wants this country; she even thinks she can afford to quarrel with *us*. But we shall stop her little game. Donnerwetter. I am here to see. But for that damnable *Friant* I should see more. But tell me—what chance has France? England, the perfidious, will not help her; Russia—pff. Spain is jealous already, and we, we who have nothing but 'commercial interests here.' 'Commercial interests,' ha, ha, ha," he laughed, delighted at his own joke. "Why we shall fan all these quarrels and then step in and take what we want. The way is all prepared; the natives are all in arms—and we shall see that they have enough arms and money to be very troublesome, I can tell you. The Consul, he has done his work well and the Fatherland has many good servants like you. And then behold we have a coaling station of the most convenient ready for when 'The Day' comes to whip these insolent English off the seas. I can tell you . . ." he raised his voice exultantly and his companion, whom the listener had by this time identified as Fritz Oldberg, murmured something about caution.

"Pah!" boomed the great voice again. "These pigs of English never learn any tongue but their own. But perhaps you are wise. What is this I hear about a passion for an English girl here? Is there no good German maiden who can satisfy you?"

Paulette flushed. She had no desire to overhear conversation about herself, but she was

afraid to move in case she attracted their notice. She did not hear Oldberg's answer, but the old man's jocular reply was loud enough to be heard across the room she thought in her distress. "Ha, and you think it is a good plan and that she will be so grateful for the rescue that she will forget the Frenchman and turn to you with love. Well, it may be successful, though I doubt it. When you are my age you will have learned that it is never safe to prophesy how women will behave. And also, doubtless, you will have learnt that one woman is the same as another and none of them worth the price of freedom. An hour or two when one goes ashore and then best forget them." He laughed uproariously.

Paulette was very wide-awake when Fritz Oldberg came to claim her for the next dance. What was he plotting in order to trap her? How could she find out? And what exactly was he doing for Germany in this hour of crisis? She must discover this if she could. She was unusually gracious now, although her contemptuous indifference to him was turning into half-frightened hatred. His pursuit of her was beginning to obsess her; he seemed somehow menacing.

"Perhaps you could introduce me to some of these fascinating sailors?" she suggested presently.

Fritz Oldberg, delighted, presented the captain and a fresh-faced sub-lieutenant. The captain assumed a hearty friendliness, but

Paulette found both his dancing and his conversation bearish; besides she was piqued. Yet he showed a certain adroitness in avoiding her most subtle probings.

The sub-lieutenant was an ingenuous youth, so fresh and with such an open-mouthed admiration for herself that she could not help liking him. He danced atrociously but allowed himself to be "pumped" with an engaging lack of suspicion. Unfortunately, except with regard to the spots recently visited by the ship, he had no information to disclose; he had no idea of their destination or their errand. He was being well-drilled, however, in the requisites for a good German patriot, for when she told him she was a soldier's daughter, he began to dig for useful knowledge with diplomacy which would not have beguiled a child. Paulette had expected a sensational evening. Nothing had happened; she was not even sure that she had garnered any information worth repeating to Louis. Only her own distrust of Fritz Oldberg was increased a hundred fold and that she would not tell her lover in case he should be alarmed. How, in any case, could the German harm her?

The next morning both the French and the German warships had gone.

VI

In the opinion of Louis de Belfort as well as in that of most people connected with the camp,

the visit of the German gunboat was in some way connected with the unrest in the interior. This opinion was naturally strengthened in Louis when he heard Paulette's report of the fragmentary conversations which she had overheard. The soldiers were on their guard, but the military distrust, was, not unnaturally, unshared by the civilian population. Among them the visit of the German warship was the main subject of conversation for three or four days but only on its social side; no ulterior motives were suspected. On March 22nd, however, all minor interests were forgotten when the really disquieting news from Fez became generally known.

Fresh rumours and facts were noised abroad every day and were cumulative in their badness. On the 21st, three days after signing it, the M'Tir repudiated their agreement with the Sultan and looted the environs of the capital. On the 23rd, 2,000 Zemmurs were reported to be in arms and concentrating against the city; on the following day an authoritive message arrived from Fez to the effect that it had been decided to send away all Europeans owing to the general unrest, "if, that is to say, it is now possible," was the significant addition. The Sultan's troops, attacking against the advice of the French, had met with a serious reverse. All the tribes from Taza to the Atlantic were in revolt, and there was dissension in the Sultan's council as a result of which the powerful Arab Sheikh, Aissa ben Omar, struck his tents and withdrew his support. A distressing panic in the Mellah

followed an almost successful attack of the rebels on the city itself, an attack only checked by the skill and devotion of the French artillery.

The situation could not well have been more serious, and anxiety concerning it spread to Europe. There were European women and children in the threatened city and no mercy would be shown to the vanquished. France *had* to act or take the responsibility for a massacre or worse. England, true to her agreement, made no comment on the proposed French action. Spain sank her petty rivalries and honourably promised support, Germany was vaguely hostile with a naive cynicism: "How did she know," sighed her officially inspired press, "that if France were to 'succour' the European colony at Fez she might not consider it essential to prolong the protection and permanently occupy the capital and so—it followed as a matter of course—all other towns in which French subjects happened to be citizens or have interests, etc?"

All this political intrigue may appear dull, but it had a direct bearing on the fate of Paulette Duncombe. If their respective countries had not been hovering on the brink of war, Louis de Belfort and Fritz Oldberg would not have quarreled and a number of people might have lived "happily ever after" instead of being involved in tragedy and grief. The quarrel sprang into life instantaneously and was a shocking exhibition of loss of control on Louis' part. It happened like this: Jean Dubois, de Belfort's

soldier servant, had a friend in the town, a wealthy and most highly respected merchant named Abdul Malek, who for once, gave up his customary wise attitude of concerning himself only with his own affairs. Abdul Malek, it appeared, was watching Fritz Oldberg for reasons of his own and, through Jean, the message which he sent to Louis was this· "The German is an enemy of France, though I have no proof, but also he is plotting evil against the fair-haired Inglesia." Nothing more could be extracted from Abdul Malek but somehow he inspired the young Frenchman with confidence. Oldberg had long been suspected; it was time he left the town, and he must go before Louis himself left Paulette unprotected.

"Go home, dearest, until all this trouble has subsided," pleaded Louis, but that was just what the girl would not do. Adventure and danger were the salt of life to her; she was wilful and too sure of her own ability to outwit any German spy. The next time that he saw the German attempting to molest Paulette the Frenchman's hot temper blazed up and he struck his enemy suddenly, heavily, between the eyes and left him to recover his senses in a clump of palmetto scrub on the road to the camp. Fortunately for Louis none had seen, and the German made no public complaint. This silence alarmed Louis; too late he realised the folly of making a personal enemy of Oldberg. The German, to strike more effectively at Louis, would strike through Paulette. And she, and Louis, could do

nothing. In a day or so, as he knew, he and Jean would be on their way to the relief of Fez and no one would believe his premonition of personal danger to the girl he loved.

The French were obliged to delay on account of the heavy rains and floods which made the country a quagmire and the rivers impassable. There was some small comfort in this, since the rebels would have little luck in their foraging expeditions.

On April 13th Meknas went over to the Pretender and France was compelled to act. Her endeavour was to make the expedition nominally an affair of the Sultan's, her part was to be undertaken at his request, in order to disarm, if possible, German hostility, still in doubt, as her inquisitive gunboat poked its way in and out of the smaller harbours. In Dar el Baida preparations were going on apace. The camp was in a perpetual ferment and every French subject in the town on the tip-toe of expectation. Every morning the whole country seemed drowned in a sea of mud after the torrential rains of the night and every morning the fierce African sun baked the surface hard again, so that by the late afternoon Hamed's accommodating legs made a fairly dry passage along the Mediouna road.

It was seldom nowadays that Paulette saw Louis and to please him she had given a temporary promise not to ride beyond the camp. When possible the sympathetic Jean was posted where he could watch the road and warn his master of

his lady love's coming, and they spent a few glorious moments together in the golden evenings of mid-April. Of his sister in beleaguered Fez there was no word, and anxiety cast a shadow over Louis' face. He was under orders to proceed with the advance guard, however, and had little time to waste in speculation.

By April 22nd the rain abated and movement of troops became possible. At the same time France decided to increase the Chaouiya force to 20,000 men and 1,500 black troops arrived from Senegal and camped outside the town. Paulette watched them march in—magnificent giants with shining coal black faces under the red fez, impudent grins and barbaric marching songs. The little Zouaves looked like pigmies beside them.

On the same day on which it became known publicly that a light column of French troops with Louis de Belfort as second in command was to accompany the *harka* when it left the coast the officers of the French military mission with ammunition and stores disembarked at the Waterport.

France was too deeply committed now to turn back and Germany's unfriendliness hardened from vague to definite enmity. A new fear arose; suppose that Germany's influence was great enough to stir up the friendly tribes along the coast when the troops had left Dar el Baida; a massacre there would be more terrible than one in Fez although more easily avenged. No one could tell exactly what reality lay behind Germany's bombastic threats.

"Go home for a few months, my dear one," Louis entreated. "And get Mrs. Johnson and the children to go too. We should be easier in our minds if there were not so many women and children to run risks."

"Is Madame Dangin going?" asked Paulette quietly.

"No, but that is different. Her husband . . ."

"Louis——" Paulette's face was all reproach.

"Soldier's wife and soldier's daughter," said Louis regretfully. "I suppose it cannot be expected of you. But what about that word 'obey.'"

Paulette laughed. "As if I ever should, Louis. But I *will* be careful."

News, more or less reliable, at last reached the coast from Fez. French relief troops were hurrying there from the four quarters of the kingdom but could do little good until the main columns arrived; the main necessity was food. Starvation might reduce the capital before help arrived. The situation inside the city remained much the same and the Europeans were still safe, although the failure of ammunition or treachery within the walls might at any moment precipitate a crisis and lead to a general massacre. The neighbouring tribes, as ever, were for the most part waiting to see which way the cat would jump before they committed themselves. There were six Englishwomen inside the city and twice that number of Frenchwomen, some Spaniards and the mission ladies. It was impossible to estimate the population of the seething Mellah, but it would be safe to sup-

pose that the Jews would share the fate of the Christians and provide material for an unspeakable orgy in the event of a rising. Supplies and ammunition were running short; fresh tribes were daily joining the rebels and the city was completely, if loosely, invested.

A runner wriggling through in a manner best known to himself brought a letter from Jeanne de Belfort to her brother, confirming the news of present safety and expressing cheerful hopes of seeing him soon with the relieving force. "*For my dear brother,*" she wrote cheerfully, "*I am at last hungry, and although for a little it is a novel experience, in the long run perhaps a little will go a long way. For the rest I am busy. There is plenty of work at the Mission and I am growing to be a skilful nurse. Yesterday I vaccinated twelve babies for they fear an epidemic of small-pox. So you see though disobedient I am useful.*" Louis brought the note to Paulette when she came to say goodbye, and if she had not already possessed high courage she would have been shamed into simulating it.

"I wish women were like they used to be," Louis grumbled. "Obedient and unquestioning, realising that their men know best and that their place is at home keeping themselves gentle and beautiful."

Paulette put her slim fingers under his chin and turned his face to hers. "Do you?" she asked demurely, her face dimpling into laughter.

"No. I would not have you even a little bit different," he confessed.

She said goodbye to her lover with eyes bright with firmly repressed tears. She could weep afterwards, she told herself. But she had no time for tears. To her astonishment, as soon as Louis was out of sight and she turned back into the house, Jean his servant asked if he might speak to her. Jean was embarrassed but persistent: "Would mademoiselle do him the honour to ride with him to the shop of Abdul Malek the Moorish merchant. Abdul Malek had a wonderful rug which he wanted to show her."

"Don't be so silly, Jean," Paulette said shortly. "Tell me the real reason that you want me to pay this extraordinary visit?" Jean refused to give any other reason and Paulette declined to go, but seeing the look of real distress on the little man's face she relented.

"I hate mysteries," she said coldly. "Is it anything to do with Louis?"

Jean hesitated. "I think if I were at liberty to tell him the reason he would wish you to go," he replied.

"Oh, very well," she consented, mystified but amiable again. "He is the man who sent the message isn't he? He must at any rate be a friend."

Paulette was even more bewildered when, attended by Jean and Omar, she reached the shop of Abdul Malek, for Jean's excuse seemed to be literally true; she had been dragged out under peculiar circumstances and at a very strange hour for no other purpose than to look at a carpet—a very handsome carpet certainly,

but it would have been just as fine had it waited until the morning and, as Jean knew very well, she could never afford to buy a carpet like that. Paulette felt angry, and Adbul Malek, perceiving it, was humbly apologetic. Paulette, whose previous view of the old man had been short and uninterested, looked at him sharply. He had wanted to see her for some reason, she decided. But why? and why had not Jean told his master? She found all this intrigue and mystery very trying; her own tendency being towards a too-great frankness.

Was Abdul Malek a friend or an enemy? Was Jean a dupe or in the secret? She glanced at Omar lounging against the front of the shop, holding Hamed's bridle and listlessly rolling a cigarette, apparently half asleep. How much did he know? With increasing irritation she realised that these men were using her for some purpose and that they were too subtle for her understanding. She made the best of the situation, therefore, and examined with interest some of the merchant's treasures which were not usually available for the public to view. Her head bent low over the tray of strange jewels which Abdul Malek was showing her, she did not notice that the curtains at the back of the little shop had parted and that a strange face was peeping cautiously through the gap. Omar saw, however, in spite of his apparent sleepiness, and his hand flew to the pistol in his belt. But his alarm disappeared almost at once, for the face, a fair one in spite of its tan, was

assuredly a friendly one. Omar had seen before the softening of the face of an Infidel as he looked upon the woman he loved. Omar's hand fell from his belt and he studied the stranger's face carefully—an Inglesi, he thought, and decided that he would know it again. His loyalty was to his mistress, not for her French lover; if there were another man, it was nothing to him, so long as no harm befell her. Long and yearningly the dark eyes of the stranger gazed at the downbent head of the girl, but Paulette was too engrossed to notice. She picked a ring out of the tray before her, a heavy gold ring with a large ruby cut curiously.

"I like this; Jean, will you tell your friend I should like to buy it?"

Jean bargained with apparent keenness for the jewel, but Paulette's knowledge of Arabic was too limited for her to know that she received the ring almost as a gift. She slipped it on her finger and bade the merchant a courteous good night; he should at least not have the satisfaction of knowing that she was baffled. In complete silence she rode back to Mrs. Johnson's house and the two conspirators who escorted her did not open their mouths.

The next morning she watched with dry eyes as the flying column, brilliant in scarlet, azure, and white, rode out of the town—Louis, Jean and a strange *légionnaire* turning their heads to catch a last glimpse of her before they disappeared in a cloud of dust.

VII

Dar el Baida was enclosed in a wall 20 feet high and built on a rockbound coast washed by the long Atlantic rollers which, breaking on a spit of sand between rocks create a surge often impassible by boats. Vessels in the open roadstead a mile from the shore were compelled to keep up steam in order at a moment's notice to be able to put out to sea and avoid being driven ashore by a rising swell. The town, at this date, had no landing stage, and the monstrous blocks of the temporary mole were washed away with every high sea. Everything had to be transferred to the great *barcasses* which could be rowed into shallow water. As it was frequently impossible to communicate with the shore for days at a time it is obvious that France was confronted with enormous difficulties in supplying her African army with reinforcements and *materiel* from overseas. There were, of course, no railways, and when the force left the coast the difficulties were quadrupled. An inexplicable number of accidents, unless they were the work of a secret enemy, were additionally hampering.

On the day after Paulette Duncombe watched Louis de Belfort and his men march out of the town she watched the first batch of reinforcements from France land at the Waterport. Perhaps the British Consulate was interested in the movements of the French troops; the English colony certainly was not, but viewed

the whole affair with a stolid indifference. The Germans, on the contrary, were as prying and inquisitive as a family of magpies. Paulette, equally impatient with indifference and curiosity, left Mrs. Johnson's home for a time in order to stay with Madame Dangin, left alone in her bungalow up by the almost deserted camp, so finally identifying herself with the French cause and laying herself open to sneering or facetious comments from the Teutons, which troubled her not at all, although in a fit of temper she flung the fact of her official betrothal to Captain de Belfort in Frau Oldberg's hostile face. It had been an open secret for so long that Frau Oldberg must have known of it, but Paulette regretted the challenge almost as soon as she had uttered it. Fritz, she was increasingly aware, was dangerous, utterly unscrupulous, and this unsettled country was full of pitfalls for the unwary.

She was glad Omar was with her; he was a host in himself and as loyal as Louis. Still the isolated bungalow outside the town walls was less safe than the Johnson's house inside the walls. Also, by quarrelling with Frau Oldberg, she had finally lost the friendship of the harmless unhappy little Elsa whom she liked, and to whom she had brought some comfort; for Elsa had a private grief which she dare not air in the presence of her family. There was a dearly loved brother, years younger than Fritz, who had disappeared in mysterious and apparently disgraceful circumstances. Elsa cared nothing for the disgrace; she was as fond

of Walther as she was in fear of Fritz, and desperately she wanted to find the boy as long as Fritz did not know. Paulette was sorry but helpless, and now poor little Elsa would not be able to confide in her any more.

With the departure of the expeditionary force reliable information ceased, and the women were entirely dependent upon rumour, which was seldom comforting. It was not calculated to relieve anxiety to hear, on May 6th, that Major Brémond's force was practically without food or ammunition; that the Pretender, Mulai ez Zin, had issued a proclamation at Meknas declaring that no Europeans should set foot in any town in the Empire except those which they already occupied on the coast; that the declaration had met with widespread applause among the coast tribes as well as among those of the interior; and that no news of the relief force had reached Fez to hearten the besieged.

Even the hope that the capital would be relieved within a week or so died away when day after day passed and it appeared that the troops had not left El Kenitra, the advanced base. The delay was sound, imperative in fact, owing to the difficulty in securing a line of communications sufficiently solid to be impervious to the perpetual skirmishing attacks to which the posts were incessantly subjeced. The enemy refused to meet in open battle, but the Beni Hassan, to whom the task of delay had been entrusted, were past masters in the art of hurricane swoops upon convoys.

In front and behind the French army despair was seeking an entrance. Would the task prove too difficult for France unassisted? Was Germany looking for the moment and the spot at which to strike? It was common knowledge now in official circles that the German agents were aiming at a colossal humiliation of France. From Dr. Rosen at Tangier, through his able coadjutor, Dr. Vassel the German Consul at Fez, to the humblest subject of the Kaiser in the Shereefian empire, there was hardly an individual who was not dabbling in some intrigue aiming at the enrichment of himself, the aggrandisation of Prussia and the ruin of France. Every official was cognizant of this, but the idea had been scouted by the public and the government of France.

In Fez the shortage of necessities was growing acute but otherwise there was little change in the state of affairs when the relief force broke camp at El Kenitra on May 12th. The advance column pressed on at a greatly accelerated pace, harassed by skirmishers but meeting with no serious opposition and strengthened by the knowledge of the advance of a full brigade in the rear.

At Lalla Itoo the rebels attempted to make a stand but were dispersed with small loss to the French. Louis de Belfort had a bullet through his foot which would ensure his absence from the punitive force which would be busy for the next few months. "A honeymoon for me," he thought exultantly.

On May 21st the relief force entered Fez without firing a shot and found all quiet within the city. The first plot of the German schemers had failed completely.

VIII

The Beni M'Tir, who had been investing the capital for so many weeks, vanished at the first glimpse of the red tunics of the Spahis. Outside the walls for any sign there was to the contrary, the siege was as if it had never been. The inhabitants poured out to watch the foreign army marching under the ancient walls with fixed bayonets and triumphant music. The "Mellah" which had escaped unutterable terrors and, unlike the Christians, realised it, poured out with uproarious rejoicing; the Jews had no illusions as to what their fate would have been had the insurgents won the town. But the staring Moors loafed in ungrateful silence for the most part, eyeing the invading Nazarenes with resentful curiosity. Had the tables been turned they would have safeguarded their property by making one cause with the rebels and submitting indifferently to a new régime. They had had too great an experience of changes in Government to expect one to be any better than another. They had no feeling as a nation, but they had pride of a sort as members of a Faith and hated to see the hosts of the Unbelievers encamped about the sacred city.

The French troops had triumphantly reached their objective, but the General's difficulties were by no means over.

The snow-capped ranges of the Northern Atlas formed an impressive background for the gracile minarets, green-roofed palaces and crenellated walls of the ancient town. The French encampment was pitched beyond the southern wall amid the luxuriant gardens and running water for which Fez is famous, and the tinkle of the fountains was very grateful to the weary and thirsty troops. Some of them, who were eccentric enough to take an interest in strange things, found this city of the past entrancing, undefiled as it had been hitherto by Infidel footsteps in any number and by a complete absence of what Europe considers civilisation. There were even soldiers who risked their lives in their enthusiasm for exploration, and among these was a *légionnaire* who said little, and most of that in Arabic to an elderly Moorish merchant who had given him a warm welcome and extricated him from at least one awkward scrape.

Owing to his wound, which was painful although not serious, Louis de Belfort was carried into the town and handed over to the care of his sister and the ladies of the Mission who had taken upon themselves the care of the sick. After the burning heat of the days of the march and feverish nights spent in the open, it was delightful to be swung through the twisting arcaded passages of the old town. The sun

hardly ever penetrated to these narrow covered corridors whose labyrinthine windings are bound by lofty walls, the unscaleable heights of which conceal wonderful palaces whose roofs sometimes lean inwards to touch each other far overhead.

Damp as a seaswept cave, dimly lit by stray inquisitive shafts of sunlight filtering through the ribbon-like spaces between the roof-tops far above, strewn with the litter of countless dust-heaps and redolent of the odours of a thousand drainless years, the streets of Fez are as fascinating as those of the Baghdad of Haroun al Raschid. Far from the tumult of the busy, cosmopolitan coast towns, impregnated with silence and mystery, from the dominating green minaret of the tomb of Mulai Idriss, the founder of the city, to the wonderful Kairouan Mosque across the thresholds of whose many gates no shadow of the Infidel might fall, the whole great city, capital of the last remaining stronghold of orthodox Islam, spread its strangeness below the shadow of the giant Atlas.

These were the bounds of Louis' vision while his wounded foot kept him a prisoner, but from Jeanne and the Mission sisters he heard of a great deal which he could not see, and presently learned how narrow had been the margin of their safety when the relief force came in sight. He learned of the revolt of the hitherto tractable garrison on the 20th, and the incident of the sacking of Lemta as a reprisal for the tribesmen's outrages. The story of the massacre and of the sale of the captive women and children in

the market place lost nothing of its embroidery of horrible detail in its passage from mouth to mouth, until the form in which it reached Louis made him put his arm around his sister with a wordless prayer of thanksgiving. God pity the woman who fell into the hands of the tribesmen when they were hot for revenge.

The outrage was officially denied, but although perhaps exaggerated, there was no doubt that it had happened and that a similar fate was not outside the possibilities which had faced the devoted little band of European women who had endured the heat and nodded to starvation through those burning days of May when no word of speedy relief had reached them.

There had been little comfort for them in any direction, for the population was sullen if not actively hostile, while the rebels around the walls killed most of the couriers and sent the rest back so maltreated that their return was the reverse of reassuring.

The arrival of the French brought provisions, ammunition and peace within the town. The dismissal of the Grand Vizier conciliated the most hostile section of the population and the Infidel army cowed the waverers, but the campaign against the offenders had hardly begun. The torture of couriers continued; convoys were attacked with increasing frequency and the road to the coast was anything but safe. It was not until June 8th that the first caravan left Fez for Tangier accompanied by a strong escort. It consisted of the wounded and the

sick and of the little band of women and children who had survived the rigours of the siege. Its pace was slow and the large body of troops acting as escort was constantly engaging in scouting and repelling the attacks of skirmishers. No inadequately guarded force could have gone a mile in safety. Jeanne de Belfort went with this convoy, of course, and Louis, owing to his wound and a sympathetic streak in his General, was sent as part of the escort which consisted mainly of troops of the Foreign Legion. A league from Dar el Baida a courier met them with a letter from Madame Dangin for Jeanne. As the girl read it her face grew white as paper and she looked at Louis with eyes dark with fear. He was riding far ahead of her and she urged her mule into a trot until she rode beside her brother, the letter open in her hand.

"Louis," she called with a quiver in her voice, "I have a letter from Madame Dangin and I feel worried. She says Paulette left Dar el Baida with Omar two days ago to meet us and is doubtless with us now."

Louis' expression was incredulous. "Paulette! What madness to think of it. But she must have changed her mind, knowing its folly. Besides Omar is a sensible chap and devoted to her. He wouldn't hear of it."

Jeanne glanced once more at the letter. "You think not," she said doubtfully. "She was staying with Madame Dangin and Madame says in this letter that Paulette had already started in spite of her expostulations and Omar's

entreaties. There is nowhere else in the town where she could be? But no, she would not be so impolite. She must have been obstinate and started and then turned back after she had sent the letter."

But the look of trouble did not leave Jeanne's face. She glanced once more at the letter in her hand and for the first time noticed a postscript:

I shall be most glad to know she is with you, dear Jeanne, for I feel worried. She left in a great hurry and all the time was spent in arguing, but she did throw at me as she left the house 'Dear Madame, I must *go. A friend has warned me that treachery is planned against the French force that is on its way back, the attack is to be just outside Dar el Baida. I must reach Louis and warn him, there is still time before they leave Rubat. Omar and I can manage. No messenger can be trusted, for many of the townsfolk are in the plot, bribed by the Germans!' After she had left I warned the Consulate and the French authorities, but she had a good start. I blame myself that I did not stop her by force.*

Every vestige of colour had left Jeanne's face. If Paulette thought they were in danger she would certainly not have turned back; she was adventurous, reckless; if she started she would go on. The girl suddenly became aware that a *légionnaire* was gazing at her intently with a face as alarmed as her own. He must have overheard her conversation with Louis, she sup-

posed, and realised the danger which a white woman ran when she rode outside the walls of the town without an escort of soldiers. The only hope was that Omar had known some place of concealment when danger threatened. There was nothing to be done, of course, until they reached Dar el Baida and found out exactly what had happened, but forty-eight hours was a long time, and if Paulette had not been stopped by misadventure she should have reached them hours ago; it would have been impossible to miss her as there was only one route. Neither was there any sign of a hostile attack. Supposing it had been a trap to capture Paulette and that she was being held for ransom? That would be uncomfortable but safe. Jeanne refused to consider anything worse than that, but then she knew next to nothing of Fritz Oldberg.

The news they found at Dar el Baida justified their worst fears. Paulette Duncombe had disappeared, leaving no trace.

Madame Dangin could provide no fresh information beyond that contained in her letter. "Paulette," she said, "had been restless for some time and indeed the situation was uncomfortable, for Frau Oldberg had made herself exceedingly unpleasant since she heard of Paulette's engagement, and Fritz had been intolerable. Paulette for a week or two had refused to go out because of the impossibility of avoiding the Oldbergs and their friends. When the courier had brought news that Louis and Jeanne were already on their way Paulette

had had a mysterious message and had gone down to the town. She returned in a great state of agitation and told Omar to pack the camping outfit, had refused to listen to enreaties or to attend to reason, and without explaining had set out with no one but Omar, who was obviously very reluctant to go. Nobody had seen or heard anything of them since they passed the walls.

Louis, distracted, could learn nothing more. Jean might have helped, but Jean had been left behind in Fez. All that could be done without knowledge was done; the soldiers scoured the country, the Maghzen searched the town. Paulette and Omar with their mules and baggage had completely vanished. Louis, curbing his tongue and his temper, interviewed Fritz Oldberg, but although it struck the distracted lover that the German looked as worried as himself, he could extract no information from him. Herr Oldberg was disconsolate and only too willing to help in every way but he could throw no light upon the mystery.

Jeanne, returning wearily to the town from the camp, her face thin and her shadowed eyes haunted with an ever growing fear, was waylaid by a *légionnaire,* the same who had stared at her so intently and had apparently shared her alarm as she read Madame Dangin's letter.

"Excuse me, ma'moiselle," he said politely, and although his French was perfect Jeanne knew at once that he was an Englishman. "Have you any news of Miss Duncombe?"

"None," she answered mournfully. "Is there anything helpful you can tell me?

The *légionnaire* shook his head. "Alas no, ma'moiselle. But there is something I can do. Find her or avenge her."

Then, noticing the look of startled surprise in the French girl's eyes, he moved closer and lowered his voice: "I am at your mercy, ma'moiselle. I come to you instead of to your brother, because perhaps he would not understand. There are reasons why I am nameless. We of the Legion do not join it for a jest. Miss Duncombe is very dear to me but she does not know that I am here. She has, I hope, forgotten my existence. I beg you to keep my secret, even from your brother; it is best for everyone."

Jeanne, wise and tender, smiled at him and held out her hand: "I will keep your secret," she said gently. "Find her if you can."

A *légionnaire* has strange friends. This one when he left Mdlle. de Belfort turned down a street, narrow and roofed with a thin thread of blue sky, less a street than a *sok* where the booths exposed all sorts of merchandise for sale, pottery, Oriental stuffs, carpets, kief pipes and tobacco, Moorish brass ware, faked in Birmingham and brought from Eastern palaces, Rahat Lakoum, perfumes, odorous gums. Before one of these booths he paused, regarding thoughtfully and with apparent interest Oriental stuffs, Nottingham lace and priceless carpets. Then, glancing up and down the street to see that he

was not observed, he entered, pausing on the threshold to slip a pair of clean *babuches* over his army boots.

"Excuse me," he murmured politely indicating his unorthodox footgear which courtesy commanded that he should shed before entering.

Abdul Malek, whose shop it was, nodded with a friendly smile. He was seated amidst his merchandise engaged in mending a Rabat carpet of lovely colors whose value forbade him to trust it to careless hands. Around him were piled bales of carpets just delivered from Bohkara and Samarkand and the air was sweet with vague perfumes—the very breath of the Orient. Abdul Malek grew increasingly wealthy; he sold his goods to the tourists who came to marvel and to the rich inhabitants of the town, and his name was known throughout the length and breadth of El Maghreb; not a town of any size but sheltered one of his agents; not a palace but was adorned by some of his goods. White bearded and patriarchal, with fragile body and benign face, he had just made the pilgrimage to Mecca for the second time; a pious Mussulman inspired by passionate and contemptuous hatred of the invading Christians, yet of incorruptible loyalty to his friends even should they happen to be of the hated Nazarenes. He saluted his visitor and made room for him on the pile of rugs at his side.

"You are welcome, Monsieur Jacques. May the prosperity of Allah be with you."

He clapped his hands and mint tea was

brought in by a comely negress who squatted on her haunches at the back of the booth until the drink was prepared, while Abdul Malek talked about business and the minor gossip of the town. When the tea was served he dismissed the slave. Jacques plunged at once into the matter which had brought him.

"I am in trouble, Abdul Malek, and I want your help."

The Moor looked at the soldier gravely and let his work fall on his knees. "Did I not swear on my hands and my head, Monsieur Jacques, on the day on which you saved the life of my little son from the hoofs of the mad stallion that my life and all that I have was yours for the asking?"

"It is a smaller thing than that which I want from you, my friend, but to me it may mean more than life," the *légionnaire* said solemnly. "The English girl has disappeared. I want news of her."

Omar might have recognised the strange face which had peered through the curtains at the back of the little shop, but the expression on the face had no softness now; it was hard and ruthless and boded ill to an enemy as he told the old man all that he had been able to learn, which was little, and not very helpful, and all that he suspected which might be of aid. Abdul Malek nodded his head gravely at intervals and let his hands lie idle on the carpet.

"You say she had a message from a friend in the town that there was a plot against your

safety. Is there any who might have sent such a message in good faith?"

"Not that I know of," the *légionnaire* replied.

"Or as a ruse?" the old man went on.

"The German Oldberg, perhaps."

"Ah," the Moor drew his breath sharply. "And would she have believed him if she knew the message came from him?"

"I very much doubt it."

"So that the message must have appeared to come from one whom she would trust?"

"So it would appear."

"And there was no letter, no sign of whom that might be."

The *légionnaire* started. "What a fool I am," he exploded. "In the garden of the house where she was staying I found this piece of paper with Arabic characters and a line of English. I thought it strange and was going to ask you about it."

The Moor spread out the torn scrap of paper on his knee. It was dirty, crumpled, and almost indecipherable but among the English words it was possible to distinguish the letters, 'arn' "Warn, probably," said the *légionnaire*, and among the Arabic characters Abdul Malek found his own name.

"It is bad, my friend," he said with the utmost gravity. "Someone knew she had been here once or twice and used my name to warn her of danger to you. So much I can see. It was a trap. I am afraid any news I can discover

for you will cause you pain. The best that can be hoped for is that she is held for ransom."

"And the worst?"

The Moor was silent but it needed no words to show the thought in his mind.

"Better to pray to God that she is dead?" the soldier asked.

The Moor nodded.

"Then I will avenge her," the *légionnaire* said grimly.

The old man's eyes gleamed approvingly—that too was an attitude which he understood. All this Christian talk of law and police filled him with contempt. If a man is wronged let him exact vengeance with his own hand.

"Your friends are my friends, your enemies my enemies," he said simply. "I will do what I can."

Two days later the *légionnaire* was in possession of knowledge which all the official enquiries had failed to discover.

"The news as I feared, my son, is bad," Abdul Malek informed him gravely. "The Roumia had an enemy—or a lover, who knows?—the German called Oldberg. He wanted to possess the Roumia and also he wanted to do the French an injury, especially the Frenchman de Belfort who had insulted him and struck him. He is a spy and has secret dealings with the rebels who have been fighting against our lord the regent of Allah. For a large sum this German persuaded men of the Zaer tribe, after sending the girl the letter which you found, to

capture her as soon as she was out of sight of the town and to keep her captive until he came to rescue her; so he thought he would discredit the French who could not secure the safety of those in their charge even under the walls of the town and also steal the maiden from her French lover, whom he hated. He meant the girl herself no harm. She was to be taken to a place of safety and well treated until it suited him to take her away. The Zaers, too, meant her no harm and would have kept their word, but they gave her too small a guard, two men only, and they were attacked by raiders, from which tribe they know not, who killed the Zaer tribesmen and the girl was carried off, Allah alone knows to what place or fate."

The *légionnaire's* mouth was set in a thin cruel line.

"And her servant, the man Omar?"

"Was blinded and left for dead but is believed to have been rescued and placed in the care of a merchant of Meknas."

"You have friends in Meknas, Abdul Malek? Can I send word to the man Omar?"

"Of a surety, my son."

"It is well. I shall need money."

"You shall have it, saviour of my son. It shall be here for you to-morrow. And more shall await you at the house of my brother in Fez."

"You think she was taken to Fez?"

"It is not certain. But at Fez you will perhaps find news of her."

"I thank you, Abdul Malek. You will be

my eyes and my ears? Money does not matter. On my honour it shall be repaid."

Once more the *légionnaire* waylaid Jeanne de Belfort.

"I have news of Miss Duncombe," he said briefly. "Bad news," and he told her what he had learned. "I think she must have been taken to Fez; it would be the easiest place to hold an Infidel woman prisoner, except perhaps in Meknas, but Omar is there. Perhaps Omar can tell me. My Colonel has given me leave, for this is not a private matter but one which concerns the honour of France. Yet what is to be done must be done secretly; nothing can be learned except through native channels which would yield nothing in official hands. I have friends and I can pass as an Arab. If anyone can find her it will be me."

"Can we do nothing?" Jeanne asked desperately.

"Only wait, ma'moiselle, and write to Miss Duncombe's family for money. If she is to be rescued it will be expensive. Abdul Malek in the Street of the Carpet Makers has supplied me. Repay him. The pay of a *légionnaire* is a sou a day," he gave a twisted smile. "Visit Abdul Malek as a customer. If there is news he will tell you."

"Can my brother do nothing either?"

"If I need help, ma'moiselle, I should be glad to know he was in Fez," he said significantly.

"But it is his right . . ." Jeanne began.

"It is my right first, ma'moiselle," the

légionnaire corrected her, and before she could reply he saluted and left her.

Meknas was a fanatical city which the foot of the Infidel might not defile; the *légionnaire,* though effectively disguised as a Moorish peasant, decided that he would not run the risk of attempting to enter the city unless he had reason to believe that Paulette had been taken there. Outside the gates he found Omar, scarred and blinded, who added details to his knowledge of the raid. Paulette undoubtedly had been carried to Fez, Omar thought, but of her fate there he could hazard no guess. It was still just possible to believe that Fritz Oldberg's bribe would ensure her safety and that she might be ransomed still unharmed. Money, to a Moor who knows the ways of the Christians, is the first thought, and he knows that for him to remain unpunished his victim must remain unharmed.

But these raiders might be men who knew nothing of the ways of the Infidel, to whom the pale haired girl with the unveiled face was no more than a shameless woman. Or Fritz Oldberg might have a native enemy only too pleased to revenge himself on the German. Impossible to unravel the tangled skein of native mentality. One could only hope, but the *légionnaire* was not sanguine as he rode southwards. Omar's ill-treatment in her service had not lessened the man's devotion to his mistress, and he had his own quarrel with her captors so he rode morosely at the Englishman's side submitting fatalistically to a guiding rope. Branded into his memory

were the voices of the men who had blinded him and left him for dead; hearing might take the place of sight in identifying them.

They entered Fez on foot in the guise of beggars, passing unmolested through the scattering tribes and the French garrison in the train of a food convoy which had escaped attack. The two beggars were instantly lost in the labyrinth of dark and hidden streets which wound in all directions between high blank walls in which the place of windows was taken by carefully barred little holes through which curious eyes stared down in a disconcerting manner. Never in this city of the apparently dead was it safe to be off one's guard, to step boldly as in an English town. And these houses were all potential prisons and torture chambers, by the law of Islam inviolable in their privacy. The *légionnaire's* heart sank as he realised even more fully than before the almost complete uselessness of looking in this city for someone whom it was intended to keep hidden. He did not even know for whom he was looking; there were no clues as to the appearance or position of the raiders. Omar as a good Moslem took the matter more calmly; he would be the more implacable enemy of the two, but his patience was endless.

"In the end we shall find them if it is the will of Allah," he murmured, and the *légionnaire* envied him his faith. If he could have trusted equally in the will of the God of the Christians half his trouble would have been lifted from him. They passed silently through

the narrow streets, taking no notice of those who passed them and trusting that they were equally unobserved. Phantoms, veiled or hooded in white wool, flitted through the alleys which were dark as night even in high noon. Refuse, dead mice, dead dogs, lay in piles on either side, and the ground was channelled in the middle by a stream, ankle deep, of liquid mud. Gloomy, mournful and sinister was the beleagured city of Fez, and no man knew who among his neighbours might be his enemy. The travellers knew that the hardest part of their task lay before them, for to trace a foreign woman, undoubtedly swathed and veiled like the thousands of Moorish women who flitted through the streets, seemed an impossible task . . . .

They made their way slowly to the house of Abdul Malek's brother, who was expecting them and received them with kindness, but at first he could give them no news. His hospitality was declined and they slept at night in a filthy *fondak* listening to the gossip of the town. For a week the *légionnaire* wandered through the labyrinth of streets by day, and lay on a filthy pile of rugs at night, seeking for a clue, while Omar sat outside the Kairouan Mosque whining for alms and listening for the sound of a hated voice—as an Englishman might wait in Piccadilly Circus sure that if he waited long enough, through eternity perhaps, his enemy must pass that way. On the eighth day he heard the voice as the worshippers emerged from the Mosque after the mid-day prayer and he traced its

owner through the winding streets to a heavy door, nail studded, set deep in one of the dark unscalable walls. For two days he waited patiently, crouching in the filth in the lane outside the door until he knew for certain that his enemy lived within. Then he returned to the *légionnaire* with his news. Thenceforward, sheltered under the cloak of the wealthy and pious Mussulman who was Abdul Malek's brother and partner, they found their task easier and mainly a question of money.

The house next door to the one they had marked down belonged to a friend and client of the merchant's. He was willing, at a price, to let it to the strangers, together with two of his negro slaves; he demurred, at first, to leaving an ancient negress with a smile like a full moon whom they wanted, but even to this he consented at length on receiving her full value paid merely for the loan. Hadj Abdullah, Abdul Malek's brother, conducted the lengthy negotiations, lest the young man's eagerness might awake suspicions. But at length Monsieur Jacques and Omar, clothed now like respectable tradesmen, moved into their new abode, less than a fortnight after their arrival in Fez. But it was, as the *légionnaire's* heart told him, a fortnight too late.

A strange enough place this Moorish house appeared to be to European eyes, practically unfurnished, cool even in these scorching days of May, but above all mysterious, full of little hidden passages and cupboards. The door was

so low that they had to bend double to enter it, and opened from a dark and narrow alley straight on to a dark turret staircase winding upwards on itself with, at infrequent intervals, heavy bolted doors and disquieting recesses full of shadows, mysterious archways, passages and *oubliettes* sinister in their reminders of the completeness of sudden disappearances of awkward guests.

From the living-rooms a narrow ladderlike staircase led to the roof-top terraces, sacred to the women-folk of aristocratic Fez who emerged towards evening preening themselves like birds of paradise with their brilliant colours on these grey-white terraces and twittering like sparrows. A man visible on the roof-tops of Fez must expect an occasional bullet to whiz past his head; he must, if he venture there at all, be cautious, secret, wiser-still, disguised. The birds of paradise, friendly enough on close acquaintance, are timid and scared at the first sight of a stranger and would unmaliciously perhaps, at once give him away. The *légionnaire*, impatient as he was, knew the wisdom of caution. A false step now might imperil the very slender chance of rescue which still remained. Though his thoughts, bitter as aloes, kept him waking three parts of the night and hammered to his throbbing brain the question: "Would not Paulette Duncombe, now, rather die than be rescued?"

In the daytime he shook some of his misery from him. The preliminaries of the search on

the roof-tops must be entrusted to the care of the good-natured negress, Massoada by name. As anyone acquainted with the Arabian Nights must know there is nothing more entrancing to the Oriental woman than intrigue; if she is not conducting a love intrigue of her own, she is aiding a friend, or spying on an enemy, or playing the dangerous game for sheer love of it. Massoada threw herself wholeheartedly into the business, her joy fading a little at the necessity for keeping a secret which would have been a glorious piece of gossip and would have made her the most welcome visitor on the house-tops for weeks to come. But threats to her safety, which a wide knowledge of the ways of men assured her would be carried out without a moment's hesitation, reinforced by the size of the bribe ensured her secrecy and her diligence in worming out the secrets of the roof-tops of the houses on either side.

For the *légionnaire* and Omar the only thing required was patience. In time there came reward. Massoada reported that there was a jealous woman in the harem of her right hand neighbour who for revenge—and money—would tell what she knew. But first she must have word with the Sidi himself; she would not trust Massoada. The old woman gave a fat chuckle! She is too old to charm her lord, perhaps she thinks there will be better fortune with a stranger. A jealous woman with an amorous tendency did not sound a hopeful tool, but the soldier had no intention of allowing scruples

to block his path. Small, dapper and a practised actor, he painted his face and tied his head and, enveloped in the veil of a Moorish woman, climbed the ladder to the roof-top. For a night, to accustom his neighbours to a stranger, though only a strange Moslem woman, he stayed, as if shyly, in the shadow, leaning on the parapet of the old wall, pensively gazing down into the dark streets below and watching furtively the women who walked in groups or sat nonchalantly on the ledges of the walls or reclined on mats, their upraised arms clasped behind their heads. Despite his gnawing anxiety the *légionnaire* was interested. Never before had he had the opportunity of watching the well-born women of Islam who never set foot in the streets, taking their ease unveiled, free from the cramping presence of their lords and masters. These Fasi women were the most beautiful, proud, and aristocratic ladies in Islam, almost untouched still by the unrest of their Western sisters.

They chattered like children released from school; they walked and laughed and sometimes climbed from one roof to another helped by a ladder or by planks which formed an improvised bridge. And some of them were astonishingly beautiful with the famed white skin of the Fasis, dark-eyed and languorous, robed in gold tunics and veiled in embroidered net, crowned with the *hantouse,* the tall gold mitre swathed in scarves of golden gauze which floated in the breeze mingling with the

unbound masses of their dark hair so that they looked like the Princesses of a fairy tale.

He was aware, before he had been there five minutes, of stealthy movements, and out of the corner of his eye perceived a dozen curious pairs of eyes peering over the parapet at the strange woman. The inspection apparently was unsatisfactory for he heard murmurs and a little trill of disdainful laughter and then knew that other heads craned over the parapet to look. But he sat aloof, silent, seemingly unaware, knowing that by a false move now he would court disaster; and presently they tired of the game and turned their attention elsewhere. The *légionnaire* to whom at all times inaction was well-nigh intolerable schooled himself to patience and sat motionless for an hour. A full moon rode in a dark blue sky, the murmur of voices and laughter and the tinkle of jewellery came to him clearly; a musician in the street below twanged the strings of his *guimbri,* and further away another beat monotonously on his little earthen drum, keeping time to a tenor voice singing a dirge-like song.

The *légionnaire* stretched his cramped limbs restlessly:

"God, how long must I wait?" he grumbled below his breath, and would have moved from his shadowed corner, but even as he rose to his feet he was aware of a little ladder being lowered from the terrace of the house next to him which towered above the level of his own. The population of the roof-tops was growing thinner as

the women descended for the night and few of these remaining seemed to be paying any attention. He held his breath and stepped back into the shadows cast by the wall. Carefully, astonishingly quietly considering her huge bulk, an enormous negress was descending the ladder, looking from side to side and then above her with an air of extreme caution. She stepped on to the terrace where the *légionnaire* crouched and looked about her expectantly, then, perceiving him, moved softly to his side.

"I bring a message from my mistress," she whispered in his ear. "Massoada told me you would be waiting. Is it safe here?"

"If you are not followed," the *légionnaire* assured her. "Massoada guards the stairs here."

"You want news of the Roumia?" the negress asked and as her companion nodded she went on: "She was brought here by the master; but my mistress, his wife, wants no strange woman in the 'harem.' The Roumia tried to kill my master; she fought him like a lioness robbed of her cubs, with teeth and nails, but she was not strong enough to withstand him for he is a mighty man. She has been locked up and beaten but she will not obey. My mistress wants peace in the 'harem,' and already my lord is tired of her. To-night they will take the Roumia to the house of Si Hassan which stands above the Oued Fez—if they have not already gone. If the Sidi has a strong guard he might be able to capture her. But hasten—hasten,

for they shut the wards of the city at nightfall."

With a word of thanks and a muttered curse the *légionnaire* threw the slave a purse of gold coins and sprang down his ladder. The house of Si Hassan above the Oued Fez had an evil reputation; he felt sick with foreboding, and fear clutched at his heart. If Paulette entered that house she would never leave it alive. He shouted to Omar, thrust his revolver into his belt and sprang down the stairs. As he passed the gate of the next house he heard the key being turned. She had gone then. He ran forward frantically, stumbling in his haste, wading ankle deep through the filth in the gutter, unheeding the cries of Omar whose stick tapped the cobbles behind him and who stumbled and fell in his efforts to follow his companion. But the warning had reached them too late; the gates of the ward were shut when he reached them, and no bribery could open them before the morning.

In the morning, with bloodshot eyes which glittered like a madman's, the *légionnaire* found the house of Si Hassan which rises above the Oued Fez, the river which runs for the most part underground, feeding the lovely fountains and the springs of the city. The river flowed above ground here, however, and was visible from the alley where, over a low parapet, the curious might look down into the water. The pool was barred with an iron grating, and against the grating there bumped gently the slender body of a woman, her pale face turned up to the sky. The *légionnaire* stood motionless,

gazing down at that beloved face and biting his lips until the blood streamed from them, while blind Omar crouched at his feet. In the courtyard of the house a man was humming softly as he walked towards the gate. The *légionnaire* had often heard the little tune before and would never in his life forget it; it was a popular song of the Fasis, with this most expressive chorus:

"The Lord of the Christians to the hook,
The Lord of the Jews to the spit,
Our Lord to Paradise,
And we will bear witness in his favour."

"It is he," whispered Omar. The gate opened and shut and the singer emerged into the alley. Before he had time to turn his head the blind man sprang and bore him to the ground, and with long slim fingers with muscles of steel strangled him, while the *légionnaire* looked on. Omar kicked the lifeless body.

"It is well," he said cooly as he helped the *légionnaire* to cast the corpse over the parapet into the river which held his victim. "Now we must find the second man."

BOOK II

FIFTEEN YEARS LATER

PART I

THE MURDER AT SHELLS

I

SHELLS is one of those picturesque riverside villages which seem untouched by the passing of time. Occasional motors hoot and roar through its narrow, winding main street, but they are generally in such a terrific hurry to leave London behind them and reach the sophisticated charm of Maidenhead that their occupants have no time to look at the old world cottages and discreet Georgian mansions of mellow brick whose velvet lawns and bright-hued flower beds slope down towards one of the quieter reaches of the river. Shells village was once part of the domain of the Earls of Shells but its feudal character is a thing of the past; its mansions and its villas are mostly owned by their occupants, and the overlord of the cottagers is mine host of the "Anglers' Rest," Joe Huxham by name. Joe himself is toothless and decrepit and boasts mainly about the number of his years, but his buxom second wife, still comely at fifty, is as

alert and businesslike as anyone could wish, and under her capable management the Inn thrives as well as, or better than, its more pretentious neighbours.

The "Anglers' Rest" is aptly named, for, apart from honeymoon couples—open or secret, Mrs. Huxham does not care so long as their behaviour is decorous and their bills promptly paid—most of the guests are riverine fishermen, those patient souls who sit all day holding a line dreamily and apparently never getting a bite. They are quiet people, that is the main point, going to bed early, rising late, talking little and never under any circumstances being noisy, quarrelsome or ill-behaved.

The Inn itself is as pretty a little hostelry as you can find in the length and breadth of England, small and two-storeyed, built of ruddy mellow brick with Dorothy Perkins roses climbing all over it in the summer time and a garden as full of flowers as an old-fashioned nosegay. It stands a little back from the road with its garden secluding it on three sides; on the fourth side it overhangs the river, only the thinnest of high banks separating it from the private landing stage where a punt lies moored. There is no towing path, no public footway, no access from the world outside except through the front gate and the trim garden. French windows open directly on to the river bank and the tiny landing stage, and the little balcony which opens from each of the back windows on the second story is but a biscuit toss from the grey stone bridge

which spans the river just beyond the Inn. The chief guest chambers (there are but sixteen in all) are those overlooking the river; humble patrons look over the front and side gardens; the family and domestic staff sleep on the side where the bridge impedes the uninterrupted view of the river. An average of only sixteen guests, and those quiet and unexacting, means a small, and more or less permanent, domestic staff.

Mrs. Huxham is a good mistress and keeps her maids; she seldom engages temporary residential help and never without carefully-scrutinised and impeccable references. No spot on earth could have seemed a less likely one for a mysterious and horrible tragedy than did the "Anglers' Rest" in the early morning sunshine of that June day on which Judith Davids was found dying in her bedroom with a gaping wound in her throat; pretty, black-haired Judy, with eyes like sloes and lips red as cherries, who had been dancing the night before in the village at a party given by her "young man's" people to celebrate the engagement of Tom Williams and herself. Both the young people were popular and there was no dissentient voice in the chorus of congratulations which broke out when Tom's rather slowly moving courtship entered on its last stage. Tom was a steady young man with a good job; no breath of scandal had ever blown round Judy.

Few people were awake when at four o'clock on the morning of June 20th, 192—, a girl's cry broke the sleepy silence of the "Anglers' Rest,"

one piercing shriek and then a girl's voice screaming: "Help, oh help. Judy's burst a bloodvessel." Mrs. Huxham, who slept in the room next to the one whence the screaming had come, was the first on the scene, appearing at the door of her room barefooted and hastily slipping into a voluminous flannel dressing-gown.

"For the Lord's sake what are you screeching for, Agnes O'Reilly? The girl's nose is bleeding, I suppose," Mrs. Huxham said crossly. All the doors on the landing were open by this time except the one on the other side of the room in which the two girls slept and which happened to be vacant that night. Figures with eyes only half open and in various stages of undress, looking grotesque in the morning sunshine, gathered about the door through which Mrs. Huxham had disappeared.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked a rubicund middle-aged man irritably.

"Girl had a nightmare I suppose," replied his neighbour. "But it is not the nicest way in the world to be awakened out of sleep."

"Oh, well," said a third, turning away with a yawn. "May as well go back to bed I suppose."

The onlookers, still half asleep, were dispersing with muttered curses at being disturbed when Mrs. Huxham reappeared at the door of Judy's room. Her usually ruddy face was white as chalk and both her work-reddened hands and the front of her flannel dressing-gown were covered with smears of blood.

"Judy's throat's cut," she said in a voice which shook a little. "Someone go for a doctor and the police."

The Inn at once burst into a hubbub of voices and confusion, figures pressed forward eagerly to sate their curiosity with a sight of the tragedy. Dozens of voices seemed to be asking stupid questions all at once. Clutching hands strove to force a way past the door where a tall young man had posted himself as guard at Mrs. Huxham's request. But Mrs. Huxham kept her head, and the guardian of the door upheld her.

"Now, gentlemen, do go back to your rooms and go to sleep again or get dressed. No one can do anything and I'm not going to have anyone else going in that room until the doctor and the police have been. Too many people have been in there already. The poor girl's dead and nothing must be disturbed. Please, gentlemen."

There was nothing for it but to obey. Slowly the little crowd dispersed and one by one the doors closed lingeringly.

Never had the village of Shells had so good an excuse for gossip as it had during the next few days. The police were busy with notebooks.

The Coroner opened the inquest and after the jury had viewed the body and the scene of the tragedy the inquiry was adjourned to allow of a post-mortem examination. The police inquiries proceeded but elicited little information which was not already public property. In the mean-

time the shuttle of rumour flew to and fro weaving a story of a very bright and variegated pattern. Press representatives early on the spot and knowing nothing of the dead girl drew obvious—and conflicting—conclusions which they exchanged over glasses of beer in the bar of the "Anglers' Rest."

"Murdered by the other girl of course," said Brown of the *Wail*. "Jealousy, I suppose."

"Well, as far as my information goes jealousy doesn't seem to supply a motive," said Jones of the *Scream* dubiously. "Every single person I've questioned says the two girls were the greatest of friends. They are both young, both pretty, occupy the same kind of job with the same pay, and have both recently got engaged to respectable young men with whom they have been keeping company for a long time and with whom they are reported to be much in love. There have been months in which some sign of jealousy would have been bound to appear if it existed."

"Um," said Brown unconvinced. "Women get jealous over nothing. It might have been the cost of the respective engagement rings."

"I suppose it might have been suicide," put in Robinson of the *Roar*. "Perhaps she was going to have a baby."

"The post-mortem proved she wasn't," said Brown.

"Oh you're an old cynic with a horrible opinion of women," retorted Robinson who was young and new to his job. "The girl was

pretty, refined, happy and equally popular with mistress, customers and staff, and, so was the girl O'Reilly. There's no object in it. I'm hanged if I can find a motive."

"Perhaps you are more inclined to swallow the village's theory," said Brown sneeringly.

"What's that?" asked Robinson eagerly.

"Bolsheviks," said Brown with a sardonic grin. "The girl Judith, they say, wasn't of the servant class at all. She came here from a convent and was reputed to be a Russian refugee—a Princess, of course. In fact, by this time I expect they are pretty well convinced she was one of the Czar's murdered daughters. By to-night you will probably hear that Lenin himself wielded the knife."

"Oh rats," returned young Robinson. "Everyone in this country seems to have Bolsheviks on the brain."

"Well, it would make a good story," retorted Brown, and as all his colleagues knew a "good story," double column, front page, was all he cared about. "A murdered servant girl, however pretty, is not going to provide a *cause celébre* in the middle of the Season. In August, now, it might be different."

But Brown of the *Wail,* generally aware to a hair's weight of the value of a news story, for once was wrong. For many reasons the murder of Judith Davids provided the most sensational "copy" of the year.

The story of the fugitive Russian princess pursued by the "reddest" of Bolsheviks cap-

tured the popular fancy. That there was no evidence of any kind to support the legend mattered less than nothing; sensation-mongers knew better. As Brown had ironically suggested rumour soon credited her with being one of the Czar's daughters who had managed to escape with the Russian Crown jewels. It was the jewels which the murderer wanted and they had not been found. To the wealth of rumours was presently added a fact. Agnes O'Reilly, the dead girl's room-mate and professed friend, had been questioned and detained by the police. A large body of public sentiment promptly veered to the side of the accused girl. The local police on their mettle to prove their smartness had not, for the present, called in the help of Scotland Yard. They contemptuously disregarded flying rumours. Indeed the divisional superintendent saw no need to consult higher authorities; to him the case seemed of the clearest; on her own evidence no one but Agnes could be guilty and her wild and improbable story of a strange man in the room only confirmed his belief in her guilt.

Excitement in Shells rose to fever heat but opinions there as elsewhere were sharply divided, though the balance on the whole weighed down in favour of Agnes. The inhabitants of Shells mostly knew Agnes and were disposed to feel friendly towards her on account of her pretty face, sweet smile and golden hair. The police were even more secretive than usual, and before the inquest pressmen could pro-

vide their readers with very little sensational information. They had to content themselves with picturesque descriptions of the Inn and the surrounding country—a great service this proved to Shells, for it brought tea-drinkers and beer drinkers and even whiskey drinkers to inspect its charm instead of scornfully rushing with dust and noise through its winding streets.

To pictorial descriptions were added character sketches of Mrs. Huxham and her ancient spouse and her bonny children, windy interviews with such visitors staying at the "Anglers' Rest" on the night of the murder as could not escape the inquisitive tentacles of the Press, and photographs, unrecognisable for the most part of the two girls, of the scene of the crime, of those who gave evidence at the adjourned inquest, and those who were expected to give evidence at the next. Out of the mass of information collected by these private sleuth-hounds very little emerged that appeared to be of value beyond the fact that some faint mystery did really seem to attach to the two girls, in that they appeared to be absolutely without kin; both were convent reared and extremely reserved about their lives before their arrival at the "Anglers' Rest." There was no lack of information about them since their arrival in Shells. All the villagers seemed willing to talk, but their knowledge amounted to very little and consisted largely of panegyrics of their pretty faces and nice manners. "Too

good they seemed for waitresses. I always told Mr. Huxham it would lead to trouble," said one, wise after the event.

"Flighty, were they?" asked Brown, intent on his theory.

"Oh no," said the respectable matron with a shocked air. "Only so pretty and such a contrast. Agnes so fair and Judith so dark, like a gipsy. But they were good girls. I never heard a word against them, and Mrs. Huxham said they were as good as daughters to her, so steady and reliable and quick."

That was the general opinion in Shells among the sober minded, though, of course, there was a ferrety-nosed minority who could scent scandal from afar. But those to whom the idea of Agnes' guilt seemed monstrous could supply no alternative theory; if Agnes did not do it, where were any clues to lead to someone else who did? The police appeared to have none. Amateur detectives, convinced that the police are fools, had to restrain their eagerness until after the report of the inquest to see if the evidence provided useful clues unobserved by official eyes.

The inquest was resumed; the court was crowded and round the doors surged and argued all those sensation-mongers who had been refused admittance and made up in gossip what they lacked in decency.

Agnes O'Reilly was represented by a solicitor engaged by Mrs. Huxham, a benevolent elderly man named Claverton who had children of his

own. Superintendent Bryant appeared for the Crown and for some reason seemed prejudiced, personally, against the girl. But Agnes was not yet on trial although she was in such a state of collapse that she was unable to appear in person.

The first witness was Mrs. Huxham, wife of the licensee of the "Anglers' Rest," who stated that she was informed of the occurrence at about four o'clock in the morning by Agnes O'Reilly, who occupied the same room as the dead girl, screaming and banging at her door and calling "Help! Help! Oh, Mrs. Huxham, come quickly. Judy has burst a bloodvessel." On the landing she saw one of the hotel guests, Mr. Frost, she thought, although she was too agitated to notice much, coming out of his room. Rushing to the room the two girls shared, witness found the deceased lying on the bed, her face covered with blood and blood everywhere.

The body was partly covered with bedclothes, the upper part being bare. There was a gaping wound in the throat from which blood was flowing freely. Witness called to one of the gentlemen to telephone for a doctor and the police, and Dr. Thorne and a policeman arrived shortly after. Although she was only half awake she would have seen at once if anyone was in the room. The sun was coming in though the blind was drawn. Oh yes, she was sure the blind was drawn, although only part of the way and crooked. When she first

saw the deceased she was still alive and stretched out her hands imploringly and tried to speak. Then she fell back with a thick kind of gurgle, made some noise that sounded like "I shall. Ah!" and died a minute afterwards. No, the dead girl did not point or try to draw attention to Agnes, and she did not have a horrified look on her face; puzzled, if anything, but trying hard to speak. She (Mrs. Huxham) had had too hard a life to lose her head easily, she went to the door and again told some of the people who were there, standing about gaping, to send for a doctor and the police. Then she went back into the room to question Agnes.

"Both the girls were waitresses in your hotel?"

"Well," replied Mrs. Huxham, consideringly, "In a small place like ours, everyone has to lend a hand where it is most wanted. They were both superior girls without silly airs; we all got on very well together and changed work as seemed most convenient. But perhaps on the whole they mostly did waitresses' work.

"You had had no occasion to find fault with them?"

"Never, though of course when we were rushed everyone's temper was a little shorter than when things were easier, but they knew I was pleased with the way they both did their work."

"Thank you. Will you go on from where I interrupted you?"

"Well, I went back to question Agnes. Th

girl was all flustered and hysterical; she was all covered with blood and kept moaning, but at last when I got her quieter she said that she was awakened by a strange noise and saw a man in the room, dressed in grey clothes and clean-shaven, who on seeing her move made a dash for the window and climbed out, pulling a coat, or it might have been a blanket or a sack, after him, and resting his hand and knee on it as he climbed out. She stared half asleep and dazed for a minute, then she sprang out of bed and went over to Judy who was making a strange noise. She saw Judy was smothered with blood and thought she had broken a bloodvessel and screamed for help. The girls slept in separate beds and always appeared on the best of terms with each other, as they both did with every other person in the house.

"Since there were so few of them it would have been impossible for any of the girls to have a serious quarrel, a lasting one at least, without someone in the house knowing about it. The two girls had been with her for about a year, but had been friends before, and had come from the same convent in London where they had been educated. They came with the highest recommendations and had soon learnt their work although it was their first place. Agnes had changed her clothes after the alarm had been given and before the police arrived, but except on her petticoat where the dead girl's head had rested she had not seen blood on any of her clothes."

The Coroner sharply: "The girl is not on trial. Is Agnes O'Reilly in custody? I have not been advised of anything of this nature."

Superintendent Bryant stated that in justice to Agnes O'Reilly she had been ordered to attend the court to hear the evidence. She was too ill to attend however. She was not before the court. He did not wish to say anything at this stage but the police might ask the Coroner to remand her later on. She was detained in custody pending enquiries.

Mrs. Huxham, recalled, stated that when she went into the room the window was up about eighteen inches, sufficiently wide to admit of a man getting through if he could climb up, which she did not think possible. She could not be sure what clothes Agnes had on when she first saw her, but she thought a dark coat over a long white garment which might have been either petticoat or nightdress. Judith had a white cambric nightdress which buttoned at the neck and had long sleeves but it was drawn right back from the upper part of her body. There was a ring on her finger, she thought, but she had not really paid much attention to anything but the wound in the girl's throat; when she saw she was still alive she thought it might be possible to save her.

Doctor Thorne, the next witness, stated that he went to the "Anglers' Rest" in answer to a telephone request soon after four o'clock in the morning and saw the body of Judith Davids lying on the bed and covered with bedclothes

to the waist. The right arm was extended over the side of the bed. After the police arrived and the jury had viewed the body he made a post-mortem examination. There was no reason why the girl should have wanted to take her own life. He found blood sprayed on the carpet about four feet from the wound in the girl's neck. Agnes O'Reilly accounted for the blood on her garments by saying that she was sitting on the side of the bed holding up deceased. Though blood was on her petticoat there was none on her undergarments, and as she was sitting on the bed he would have expected to find it had soaked through all her garments, also on her chest and arms, but no blood was on her clothing where he expected to find it. He examined Miss O'Reilly and found blood-stains on a finger which she said she had cut.

At Superintendent Bryant's request Agnes O'Reilly's penknife was here produced. The big blade was very blunt but the little blade had recently been sharpened. It had marks like blood on it. Dr. Thorne examined it. It could not, he thought, inflict the wound with one gash. It could not, in fact, in his opinion, inflict the wound at all, which must have been made with something with a serrated edge. The doctor here detailed the nature of the wound in the neck which struck him as peculiar; it was certainly not a clean cut or stab. He also had found two small wounds on the right hand as if the deceased had clutched a sharp instrument with two points.

There were no other signs of violence on the body and the girl had been in perfect health. Her garments were saturated with blood and both arms were covered with it. There were bloodstains on both thighs and right down to the toes. All the organs were perfectly sound. Death without doubt was due to hæmorrhage from the wound in the neck. All the superficial vessels and muscles were severed and the windpipe at the upper end, and the wound had struck the external jugular vein. It could not, he thought, have been inflicted by an ordinary knife, even by a person possessed of enormous strength. There was terrific force behind it. It was not at all a clean cut, in fact he could not hazard a guess at the weapon which had inflicted the wound, for it had a strangely torn appearance as if the weapon had a jagged end.

People in the court who sympathised with Agnes heaved sighs of relief. The case in the beginning had looked black against her; it was even possible to suppose that both the superintendent and the doctor had thought her guilty, but colossal strength and a strange weapon, no trace of which had been found! She was such a tiny thing, not much more than five foot tall and so slender. She had been brought into court by this time, and Mrs. Huxham ventured to smile at her encouragingly. But the Coroner had not finished with Dr. Thorne. "Did you question Agnes O'Reilly?" he asked. Agnes, it appeared, had not waited

to be questioned; she had volunteered the information that on waking suddenly she saw a man bending over the deceased and screamed, "Oh, you brute," whereupon he jumped through the window and escaped. She was awakened by a gurgling sound from the other bed. He, Dr. Thorne, found no marks on the windows.

Agnes told him she had locked the bedroom door after she had gone up to bed and had unlocked it again to get out to fetch Mrs. Huxham in the morning. The man had therefore either been in the room all night or had got in and out of the room by the window; there were no marks to show which. It was only a drop of fifteen feet from the window to the ground; getting out would not be difficult, but he was hanged if he could see how anyone could get in without a ladder. There were neither pipes nor creepers by which he might have climbed. The intruder would have to put his foot on Agnes' bed to get in, and a careful examination of the bedclothes had revealed no mark of such a kind as a foot or boot which had pressed on the grass or earth of the garden must have made. A person getting through the window must have disturbed articles on the dressing-table, which did not appear to have been done, and must have made marks on the window-sill of some kind. On examining the dead girl's bed he found a small velvet bag containing a ring under her pillow, but he saw no ring on her finger such as a previous witness had described.

"I could a' sworn she had a ring on her

finger," murmured Mrs. Huxham to her neighbour.

There was a stir in the court when Tom Williams, looking woeful and yet sheepish, was called. Yes, he had known the deceased ever since she had been at the "Anglers' Rest" and had been walking out with her most of the time. She never went out alone or with other chaps; never, in fact, with anyone except Mrs. Huxham or Agnes O'Reilly. They had been strict with her at her convent and she always did as she thought her nuns would like. Besides, she was timid like, and never spoke to or looked much at strangers; it was as if she was scared of them. He didn't know much about her before she came to Shells. She had told him her parents were dead and they had looked after her at the convent, first in France and then near London, since she was a little girl. He did not know what country she came from. She spoke English as if she was used to it. He had not bothered her much with questions; it didn't matter, he knew she was a good girl.

He was very fond of her and she had never given him cause to be jealous; he had never heard a word against her from anyone. He was sure she had no enemy. He had given her an engagement ring, gold with three diamonds in it, the night before. It was the ring in the bag under her pillow. They had had a party with dancing. Agnes O'Reilly had been there and her chap had come in for a minute and Agnes had gone with him. No, he'd never seen

the chap before, though he would know him if he did, and he knew Judy had not seen him either. He lived in London, he had heard, and it was just chance that he had come down to see Agnes that night; he had not been invited.

He might have seen Judy while he looked through the door into the room where they were dancing; he couldn't say; but certainly he had not spoken to her or she to him. Agnes had left early with the man and he had taken Judy home to the "Anglers' Rest" himself about 11 o'clock. She had gone straight in and he had watched (he flushed a little with a villager's embarrassemnt at confessing to sentimentality) until her light went up. He had seen Agnes go in a minute later but had not spoken to her. There was certainly no doubt as to the genuine friendship between the girls Why, he had never even heard of a tiff between them. There was certainly no cause for jealousy. He and Agnes had never had much to do with each other and Judy had never spoken to the chap Agnes went with.

Tom Williams' voice failed him, but, with an effort at self control, he went back to his seat.

Constable Brunt said that when he interviewed Agnes O'Reilly she was crying and saying, "Oh, poor Judy, she was my only friend." She described to him the man she saw in the room; clean-shaven and a young man and wearing a grey suit.

No further evidence was called and the in-

quest was adjourned to allow of certain exhibits being sent for analytical purposes.

Subsequently Agnes O'Reilly was brought before the police magistrates and charged on suspicion with having murdered Judith Davids at the "Anglers' Rest" on the morning of June 20th.

At the request of the police she was remanded for a week. Bail was not asked for.

Brown of the *Wail* drank his beer thoughtfully at the bar of the "Anglers' Rest." He was less cocksure than he had been. "I'm hanged if I can see the motive yet," he said with a frown. As an expert on crime it was annoying to be baffled like this.

"All the same the case looks pretty black against the golden-haired Agnes."

"It will be a pretty long business," grumbled Robinson, "if they are going to question everyone who was in the hotel on the night of the murder. There were about twenty adults to say nothing of the Huxham children; surely someone must have heard sounds of some kind before the girl shrieked. I should say the girl Agnes is lying, and although it doesn't look as if she did it herself she probably knows who did. Her young man's *alibi* can't be shaken, but what about the possibility of her having another lover among the guests? Suppose she didin't want anyone to know about it and let the man into the room, locking the door after he entered and trusting to luck that the other girl did not wake up. Unfortunately for her she did wake

and the other man in a fright murdered her. Then Agnes let him out hurriedly and relocked the door before she began to scream? How's that for a possible theory?"

"Two good objections," said Brown briefly. "Commonsense would have sent the girl to the man's room rather than him to hers. And the impressions of fingerprints on the door have not yielded any which do not belong to people who had legitimate business in the room. Also the guests all volunteered to be searched, both their persons and belongings, and nothing was found. The police were pretty thorough too. Why, here's a man who might see daylight. Hie! Jimmie Smith of the *Argus*. Crime's not your job. Where the hell did you blow in from?"

II

Jimmy Smith did not, in point of fact, see much daylight at the moment. He knew as much about the case as the police did, and something which they had not yet discovered, but he did not for once propose to share his additional knowledge with his colleagues of the Press, though he had a reputation for generosity in that way. He could and did however, supply them with a good deal of picturesque detail and first-hand knowledge of the more obvious aspects of the case, since the "Anglers' Rest" had happened to be his home

at the time of the tragedy and he had been one of the first on the scene. "I can't provide you with clues," he said, "since there do not appear to be any. I supplied the police with a possible one and they jeered, so I shall not give you an opportunity to do likewise. Indeed, I cannot see how or why myself."

"Or who," asked Brown quickly.

"Ah! that's different, and as I have for the moment absolutely no support I shall not make any libellous statement. Poor little Judy," he said mournfully. "She was such a nice kid. Poor Agnes! for that matter; she's a nice kid too and she seems to have the noose uncomfortably near her neck."

"Guilty, do you suppose?" asked Brown with interest. Jimmy Smith was one of the few people on whose judgment he placed reliance.

"Good Lord, no. But of course she knows more about it than she proposes to tell, poor child."

"Have you got any definite theory as to who did it, Jimmy?" asked Brown, dropping his indifferent air.

"Well, Hugh, this yarn of the Russian princess which is going round the village is not quite so fantastic as such yarns usually are. I don't mean that I take it literally, of course. I doubt whether the girl was Russian; I feel sure that she was not a Princess, but she was undoubtedly something of a mystery. She was not either by birth or upbringing the kind

of girl one expects to find acting as waitress in an out-of-the-way inn, even in these topsy turvy democratic days. I hardly spoke to her, except officially, in the course of her duties; but for some reason or other, not amorous, you old cynic, I found myself watching her with extraordinary interest, and I must confess to a feeling of acute disappointment when she engaged herself to the estimable but commonplace Williams. There was something vaguely familiar about her, too, as if I had seen her or someone very definitely of her type before; so I made enquiries about her and learnt surprisingly little. She came here as you heard from a convent near London, somewhere in Surrey, where she had been trained for domestic service.

"She went to that convent in London from a convent in France, somewhere in Normandy, where her position had been very different from that of a domestic servant; she had in fact, until the death of her patroness, been the protegée of a very great lady indeed, who had put her into that convent for safety. The Comtesse was of the *ancien régime,* gracious and generous, and was obviously fond of the child, although the lady's reputation and conduct were so blameless that not even the most scurrilous of tongues ever hinted at any scandalous reason for that affection. The child, she said, was a war refugee, and there were reasons why she would be safer in a convent than in a private house. So the legend of the Russian princess originated. Madame la Comtesse is

dead. The Mother Superior of the convent either knows, or will say, nothing. So that the history of poor little Judy Davids before she reached the age of thirteen is wrapped in what appears to be impenetrable mystery. She *might,* for all the evidence there is to the contrary, be a Russian princess, though I do not think so, but Russia six years ago was an even stranger place than it is now."

"Do the police know all this?" asked Brown.

"They know that much," said Jimmy Smith significantly, "but as they are looking for a motive, and have very little belief in long standing feuds or vengeance wreaked on the innocent in this orderly country, they think six years back is far enough for them to poke. They are looking for what they consider an adult motive. They pooh-pooh the notion of Bolsheviks and a child victim whom they lost at the age of thirteen, and as for the missing Crown jewels . . .! Splendid fellows the British police and smart at their work but when it comes to looking for motives they are excessively insular and limited. I would not mind betting that if you asked them for the motives which lead to murder they would say, 'Well, apart from maniacs, ninety-nine per cent. are due to love or greed.'"

"Superintendent Bryant has already said so," said Brown with a grin.

"He is right, too," said Smith laughing "But there is always the hundredth case for

which they need a subtler knowledge of psychology."

Jimmy Smith was right in this case; there being no question of money apparently, unless there was anything in this improbable story of the hidden jewels in which they did not for one moment believe, the police had, with remarkable uniformity, decided that the only possible motive was jealousy, the most probable criminal Agnes O'Reilly. It should not take long to discover the connecting link—someone who had heard the two girls quarreling or had seen either of them on two friendly terms with the other one's "young man." Later, if they found themselves baffled, they might refer the case to more experienced brains at Scotland Yard, but for the moment the local police thought the case simple enough and hoped to earn commendation for their smartness. Superintendent Bryant, a pompous and self-satisfied individual with an unexplained prejudice against Agnes O'Reilly, refused to consider seriously any other possible culprit. Agnes had had occasion to snub him once and he had never forgiven her, but there were few people who knew of that.

That missing piece of knowledge which Jimmy had and they had not would probably only have confirmed their suspicions, but for Jimmy himself it led in quite a different direction. It had come into his possession quite by chance, in the course of a chat with old Dr. Fellows, who had not been called at the inquest but who

had attended Judy Davids during a threatened attack of appendicitis some months before. Dr. Fellows was an old friend of Jimmy's, as friendships go in post-war years. When Smith had come back from France at the end of the War he was suffering from a complaint very common among ex-soldiers. Few people ventured to give the disease a name but the prescription was almost always the same—rest, rest and more rest. Jimmy, having been in earlier years a person acquainted with the harsher side of reality, something of a philosopher, and possessed, as a rule, of robust commonsense, had realised that he was a sick man but that his sickness, himself assisting instead of hindering, was probably curable.

He had taken the advice of the Army doctor and on demobilisation had sought rest at Shells, despite, or perhaps, with sardonic humour, because of, its unpropitious name. He had for months slept and eaten and fished and at frequent intervals gone to call, semi-professionally, upon Dr. Fellows. The doctor, who was seventy, had had a bad attack of that epidemic of hero-worship which had manifested itself among some sections of the civilian community. As during the war so during the peace, nothing was too much trouble for the doctor when the patient was a shell-shocked soldier. Jimmy Smith was almost completely cured, thanks largely to himself, but nevertheless he felt an infinite gratitude to the man who had helped.

The friendship between the two was deep

and unbreakable and full of reserves. The old doctor's life was apparently an open book, but of Jimmy's prior to August 1914 no word was said on either side. He had had special knowledge of certain subjects and that fact enlarged upon by an influential friend had secured him a job on the *Argus,* a morning newspaper of some weight which had found his contributions on his special subject of such value, and his general journalistic ability so marked, that he had been offered a job on the regular staff with a roving commission and a good deal of liberty. The life suited him admirably and left him leisure for other pursuits and free-lance writing. The doctor found him a study of absorbing interest in the rather dull environment of an unprogressive village. Though cured of his ailment Jimmy did not forget his friend and his enthusiasm for fishing brought him to Shells, generally as a visitor to the "Anglers' Rest," at frequent intervals. He had been there a week when the tragdy occurred and on the day the inquest opened he dropped in to see his friend.

"What do you think of it, Doctor?" he asked as he sucked at his pipe in the lamplit room which the doctor dignified by the name of library and in which he refused to have anything as newfangled as gas or electric light.

"Well, speaking in confidence between you and me and the doorpost, I think my esteemed colleague is a bit of a fool," he said with a twinkle which had a hint of trouble behind it.

"What, Thorne?" Jimmy asked with some surprise. "He seemed a bit prejudiced against Agnes I thought, but otherwise his evidence seemed clear enough."

"Clearly enough perhaps on the main point, but he's a lazy beggar. Fancies himself as a private detective instead of getting on with his work as a doctor. Crime, in point of fact, is his hobby, and the apparent simplicity of this case annoys him because it does not provide him with enough matter for ingenious deduction. It is only a matter of a little delay before the weapon is found, he told me. I'm not quite clear about my own course, Jimmy. I know something which might, by some possibility, provide the police with a clue, although I am nearly sure that it wouldn't. I wasn't going to tell that fool Thorne and I'm not too great and admirer of Bryant."

"Better tell me, Doc. and ease your mind," said Jimmy gravely.

"Well, Thorne said there was no shadow of doubt about the cause of death being a severed jugular vein. He made a cursory examination, very cursory, I should say, found that the girl was not going to have a baby or anything that might have induced her to take her own life, and that all her organs were sound. The cause of death was what mattered. Having decided what that was his interest shifted to the possible criminal who, obviously, must be Agnes, opportunity and motive elsewhere being lacking."

"We'll leave those statements undisputed for the moment. Could he have discovered anything else vital?"

"Well, it may or may not be vital but it is certainly something which he does not appear to have discovered and which may hold a clue."

"Get it off your chest then, Doc., that the ends of justice may be served."

"I promised the poor child not to tell, but it may be that I ought to speak now. The police have not questioned me, fortunately, and don't seem likely to, though I am Mrs. Huxham's medical attendant and was generally called in for any of the staff. It was one of the boarders who sent for Thorne on the morning of the tragedy. You shall decide for me, Jimmy, and if you think I ought to let that crowd of gaping fish know, say so; if not, give me your promise to hold your own tongue.

"Right you are, Doctor."

"Well, some months ago, Mrs. Huxham, who is a good soul, was a bit worried about a pain that doubled Judy up at times, thought the girl might be working up for appendicitis and sent her along to me for advice. The pain was easily explained and easily disposed of but in the course of the examination I found that Judy had had a baby."

"Good lord. That nice kid," exclaimed Jimmy, "but how was that possible when she had spent all her life in a convent?"

"That is what puzzled me. She was most terribly upset when she saw I had found out,

clasped her hands distractedly and looked me straight in the face with those lovely honest eyes of hers. 'Oh, doctor, promise me you will not tell,' she said with the most heart-rending pathos. 'It was not wickedness. My husband . . .'"

"Husband?" exclaimed Jimmy incredulously. "But every moment of her life since she was thirteen has been passed under the supervisory eye of some respectable person."

"That's right, but in Bolshevik Russia and other countries where queer things go on, lack of years is no safeguard. There are places where thirteen is regarded as maturity."

"I know. Go on," said Jimmy curtly.

"She told me nothing," pursued the old doctor quietly. "All she said was 'Ah, doctor, in this happy England it is good to be a child, but there are other lands where childhood ends early. I lost my baby but I swear to you there was no disgrace. Madame la Comtesse knew, but not the good nuns who sheltered me."

"Do you think it was Russia she fled from?"

"I cannot say, my boy, but I have an idea, based on nothing tangible, that is was not."

"Do you know who this Comtesse who befriended her was?"

"No, she refused to say any more."

"I have questioned Mrs. Huxham and she says she does not know, and before the police took Agnes away I asked her and she, too, professed ignorance. Judy was mighty mysterious for so apparently frank a girl."

"What about the young man, Williams?"

"A nice youth but an absolute country yokel. Judy told him nothing except about her convent life. All he cared about was the possibility of a rival and to the best of his belief and the belief of everyone else there was none. Outside the inn Judy never appears to have spoken to a man and inside the inn, although she was amiable enough, she gave absolutely no cause for gossip."

"What about the nuns?"

"The Mother Superior of the English convent is perfectly frank. She had charge of Judy for four years, during which time the child was always obedient, and in the care of someone responsible. She had no visitors and no letters except from the convent in France?"

"Not even from Madame la Comtesse?"

"Not unless they came under cover from the French convent."

"And the French convent?"

"Courteous but no information to give."

"Um. Do you think yourself that this knowledge holds a clue?"

"I cannot be sure. I have been puzzling over it. If you say so . . ."

"Don't say anything, Doc., unless Agnes is found guilty. Then any possible clue must be investigated. This may be important, but if the nuns cannot or will not speak I don't see what use there is in providing more food for gossip and scandalous surmises. No one, of course, would believe in that husband. I feel sure that

Agnes.did not do it, but I feel equally sure that she knows who did and perhaps she knows that about Judith. If so and she is sent for trial she is pretty sure to say what she knows."

"Have you any definite reason apart from pure prejudice in her favour for thinking she did not do it?"

"Why, yes. Although Judy could not speak clearly she was still conscious and could move her arms. Do you think if Agnes had done it Judy would not have pointed at her or indicated at least by a horrified look at her that she was guilty?"

"I agree. There is no doubt the unfortunate girl was conscious."

"Besides," Jimmy went on, "I can't for the life of me see why Agnes should be the only person suspected. There were other maids and fifteen men guests in the hotel at the time. Why not one of them?"

"Does any one else except you know this about Judy?" Jimmy asked after a pause.

"She said no one at all, by which I suppose she meant Agnes as well."

This was the secret which Jimmy knew, but he gave no hint of it as he talked with his Press colleagues in the bar of the "Anglers' Rest."

III

The inquest was resumed. Superintendent Bryant appeared for the Police and Mr.

Claverton for Agnes O'Reilly. The Court was crowded and a number of witnesses were called, chiefly the guests who were staying at the "Anglers' Rest" on the night of the tragedy. Harold Norton said he was a commission agent and was staying at the "Anglers' Rest." He slept in Room 13.

The Coroner here advised Superintendent Bryant, who was trying to interrupt, to allow witness to tell his story in his own way. Mr. Norton went on: On the morning of June 20th he was awakened by a scream. He did not get up for a few seconds. He was not fully awake and did not realise what the noise was. His room was on the opposite side of the house opening on to a balcony which overlooked the main staircase. He heard moans and exclamations and opened his door. Looking over his balcony down towards the lower part of the house he saw the lower half of a person approaching from near the dining-room door.

Immediately afterwards he realised it was a woman and recognised Agnes O'Reilly, one of the waitresses. He called out "What is the matter?" and she replied "Oh Judy's broken a blood-vessel. I came to get brandy." Witness then rushed along the balcony where he encountered Mr. Frost, another visitor; together they went along to the door of Number 16, which was, he knew, the room which the two girls shared. There was a terrible gasping, gurgling sound in the room and he heard Mrs. Huxham's voice inside. A shaft of sunlight

was coming into the room but the blind was partly down. There was light enough to see Miss Davids lying on the bed and waving her hands. Witness went into the room and paused.

Miss Davids seemed to be all red with blood and he, himself, was standing with his bare feet in some soppy stuff; he did not then realise what it was. That was about three feet away from the bed. Only Mrs. Huxham, except himself, was then in the room. He turned and rushed out of it and called to some men whom he saw on the balcony opposite. "She's broken a blood-vessel, don't go in there, it's dreadful." Mrs. Huxham called after him, "Ring up a doctor," and he called up Dr. Thorne, whom he knew. When he went back, he met Mrs. Huxham, covered in blood and looking very pale who said, "Oh my God, the girl's throat is cut." Witness followed her back into the room and was followed by Mr. Smith, another visitor, who had been on the balcony. Mrs. Huxham pointed out with her finger a dark mark on the girl's throat. Mrs. Huxham then asked witness to call up the police which he did, and he called the doctor again and shortly afterwards both of them arrived. Mr. Smith then stationed himself at the door of Number 16 and witness did not again go inside.

To the Coroner: Mrs. Huxham had a glass in her hand the first time he entered the room but not when she pointed to the wound. He

did not know if it were the same glass containing brandy which Agnes said she had been sent to fetch. He did not pay much attention to the blind but the room was certainly fairly light as if it were not fully drawn.

To Superintendent Bryant: He heard a solitary scream and could not say whether it came from Miss Davids or Miss O'Reilly. He saw Miss O'Reilly shortly afterwards; she was not screaming then. Her dress seemed whitish but he could not see details as she came up the stairs. He could see she had a grey coat on but underneath she seemed to have some white garment which covered her from neck to feet. The coat was not completely fastened and he was nearly sure that the top part was white; he was quite certain that the lower part was. She did not then have on a dark skirt tucked up, and he saw no blood on her. He did not notice where the blood in the room came from but he did feel a wet patch under his feet. He did not touch the dead girl. His horror was so great that he turned and fled. He did not speak to her. She was still alive because she was making a noise and there was a terrible look in her eyes. She could not catch the words he thought she was trying to say. She was still alive the second time he went into the room but not when he went back after ringing up the police, which was four or five minutes later.

Witness, continuing, said he knew Miss O'Reilly slightly, having stayed at the hotel

for some days. He had heard her voice the night before. He had not been alone in the company of either girl or had any private conversation with them. He had never before been inside Number 16. He had been to the door and had laughingly called out "Good night" to the two girls. He knew nothing about either of them but had formed the impression that they were very good tempered and well behaved.

The night before the tragedy he saw Mr. Frost on the back verandah from which the sound of Miss O'Reilly's voice was coming. There were other voices there. He had not seen anyone walking with Miss O'Reilly, but he had heard her say "Good night" to someone before she went on to the verandah where later he heard her speaking to Mr. Frost. He had heard the voice of the man to whom she called out but he did not know it. Someone had said earlier in the evening that the two girls had gone to a party—Miss Davids' engagement party—and that Miss O'Reilly had left early and had walked home with her own young man. He did not hear Miss Davids come in, but he thought it must have been before Miss O'Reilly.

Foreman of the Jury: "We should like to know if the voices you heard were friendly?"

Witness said they were. He could not remember Mrs. Huxham pulling down the window after the discovery of the tragedy but he saw her supporting the injured girl.

To Superintendent Bryant: When he heard the scream he did not think of either girl.

To Mr. Claverton: A woman went out of Number 16 before he reached it; he did not see who it was. Frost's room would be the nearest in which a man slept. Number 15, next to the girl's room, was empty. The woman went towards Mrs. Huxham's room and he heard Miss O'Reilly's voice calling to her.

Mr. Claverton: "I want to know distinctly what you said. Was it that Miss O'Reilly's dress was white from the knee down?"

Witness answered "Yes," but it might have been white above too.

The next witness was Thomas Roberts, an accountant, who was also staying at the "Anglers' Rest." He said that he was awakened by Mr. Norton's shout of "What's the matter?" He did not hear a scream but he did hear a woman's voice calling, "For heaven's sake get the key of the dining-room and fetch some brandy." He did not know whose voice this was. He looked at his watch; it was 4.10 a.m. He stood on the landing and then went back to his room. He knew nothing of either girl except in their capacity of waitresses. He had never seen anything to make him suppose there was ill-feeling between them.

The next witness, Charles Frost, said he was a Civil Servant and was staying at the "Anglers' Rest" for the fishing. He was a widower. His room opened on to the balcony and was next but one to that occupied by the two girls; but overlooking the river whereas theirs was at the side of the house. The room between was

unoccupied but there were no doors between the rooms. He had been with Miss O'Reilly on the verandah for a few minutes on the night before the tragedy. The Coroner here objected to Superintendent Bryant putting certain questions to the witness.

The witness continued: He and certain other visitors to the hotel were sitting on the verandah when Agnes O'Reilly came along dressed in a long coat. She was alone but he heard her call out to someone at the gate. He did not see who it was but a man's voice called out "Good night, darling." He thought Agnes said something about a blind but he could not say what the conversation was. It did not seem important; just chaff, he thought. On the morning of the murder he was awakened by some kind of rattling at his door. He made some answer, being only half awake. He had not heard anything before that. Someone called to him to come out and he heard a voice which he thought was Miss O'Reilly's cry out, "I must go and call Mrs. Huxham. Poor Judy is dying. She has broken a blood vessel." She sounded so frightened that he woke up properly then and went to his door, but Agnes had already fetched Mrs. Huxham who was in Number 16 by that time. Agnes had run down the stairs to the dining-room.

The Coroner. "How was she dressed?"

Witness said she had on a grey coat. Below the coat he could not say for certain but he thought some long white garment. She went

to Mrs. Huxham's room and then downstairs. He rang up Dr. Nevin but could get no reply. Norton called Dr. Thorne.

To Superintendent Bryant: He thought it was Miss O'Reilly who spoke about the blind but he did not hear properly; the conversation did not seem to be important, and in any case it was no business of his. There were several other people with them during the time they were on the verandah. They were there from about 9.30 to 11.30 p.m., but Miss O'Reilly was only there a few minutes. He was fairly sure that they would have heard anyone going into the house from where they were. As far as he knew no stranger had gone into the house during the evening unless they had entered from the other side where the public bar was. He had heard next morning about a ring having been given to Miss O'Reilly.

Superintendent Bryant (sharply): To Miss O'Reilly?

Well, he thought so, but she might have been talking about Miss Davids; she seemed a little hysterical. He had not made love to either girl; they were not that sort, but he had been on friendly terms with them and had known them both for about six weeks. The first time he saw Miss O'Reilly on the morning of the tragedy she was not wearing the dark skirt. When he saw her half an hour later she was wearing it. He saw no blood about her. Witness asked to be allowed to make a correction: the first time he saw her she might have

had on a dark skirt but all he saw below the grey coat was white. He heard no screaming, but he was a very heavy sleeper and although Number 16 was only about twenty yards from his room he heard nothing until the tapping at his door.

The next witness, Jenny Glynde, said she was a waitress not now in employment. About a month ago she was in hospital. Agnes O'Reilly brought a nightdress to her there and lent it to her. Witness lost the nightdress and sent back one of her own.

A nightdress was produced in Court by the police and handed to the witness. She recognised it as the one she sent back; she had sent it sometime during the week before the tragedy and had written at the same time to Agnes saying she was sending it and why. A letter produced in court was the one she wrote. She had known Agnes for over a year and had slept in the same room with her for five months. Agnes was a light sleeper. She used to wear white cambric nightdresses. The one Agnes lent her had a frill on it and she used to have another like it.

Witness did not know Miss O'Reilly before she went to the "Anglers' Rest," but they had been there together for over a year. Judith Davids had been there most of the time, but she came some time after Agnes. The two had always been friends and had been together for years in the convent. Witness used to sleep in Number 16 before she left the hotel because of

illness; Judith took her place there; before that Judith used to have a room to herself.

Superintendent Bryant. "Was Miss O'Reilly a flighty girl?"

Witness (indignantly): "No, a very staid girl."

Bryant: "Do you know the man to whom Miss O'Reilly is engaged?"

Witness: "No, he lives in London and never comes here. Agnes meets him in London and occasionally in Staines."

Bryant: "Did Miss Davids know him?"

Witness: "No, she told me when she came to see me in hospital that she had never seen him, but she joked Agnes about marrying a countryman of hers."

Bryant (sharply): "What's that?"

Witness: "Oh well it was a joke of Judy's that she had a Jewish name but she wasn't a Jew. She was a Catholic."

Bryant: "That's not a nationality. Where did she come from?"

Witness: "She never told any of us. She had a dreadful time during the War and begged us never to ask questions or talk about it. Her life, she said, began in France."

Bryant: "But hadn't you any idea?"

Witness (hesitatingly): "Well we all thought it was Russia. She never said it wasn't. She was different from us; as if she had had servants instead of being one. But none of us knew. Not even Agnes or Tom Williams."

Bryant: "Was she popular in spite of this secretiveness?"

Witness: "Why we all loved her. Agnes most of all."

Mrs. Huxham, recalled, said she slept in the room on the other side of Number 16 overlooking the garden and below the bridge but not directly over the river. Her husband slept at the front of the house. He was an old man and ill and had not left his room for some weeks. One of her little sons was sleeping in the room with her. After she touched deceased she found blood on her hands. She thought that Miss O'Reilly was wearing a grey coat and a dark skirt but she was too upset to notice. The first time Agnes only came to the door of her room, but after Judy died one of the girls asked if Agnes could go and change her clothes and she told her to go to her (Mrs. Huxham's) room to change. Witness saw her washing her hands and feet and when she came out of the room she had on a dark red dress. O'Reilly was in the room with deceased when the witness first entered it and told her that a man had jumped through the window, but witness did not stop to question her then but sent her for brandy. After O'Reilly had changed her clothes she went to the pantry and sat down and began to cry. Witness could not say what clothes she took off; she certainly did not leave a nightdress in witness's room. Agnes was a quick tempered girl but not violent.

To Mr. Claverton: The eiderdown quilt

might have been drawn across the window sill. If so, it might account for there being no marks on the sill if someone had climbed out. Agnes had picked up the quilt from under the window a minute or two after witness entered the room and before she changed her clothes, but she did not think it possible that the nightdress was mixed up in it. She had not seen a blood-stained nightdress at all.

Charles Herbert said he was a mining engineer and had been staying at the "Anglers' Rest" for a week. On the night of the tragedy he heard a scream and joined the other men on the landing but did not go into the room. That was about 4 a.m., but he did not look at his watch. He was a light sleeper and between 1 and 2 a.m. he thought he heard a stealthy footstep coming up the back staircase which adjoined his room, but he attached no importance to it as he thought someone had probably been out late. He had asked in the morning if anyone had been out late but had not been able to find out who it was. Mrs. Huxham had told him that everyone was in by midnight when she had gone round locking up and fastening the windows. The house was generally locked up about 11.30 p.m. unless someone asked for it to be kept open later. On that particular night it had been later than usual because the two girls were out at a party and there was some delay in going to bed because it was very sultry and a number of them had been sitting out on the verandah until late. He had seen no stranger in the hotel; only the

resident visitors who had all been there some days and whom he knew by sight.

Janet Ray, laundress, said that on the day of the murder she put some rags under the copper and burned them. The sergeant asked if she had burned anything out of the dead girl's room. She said no, because she thought he meant anything which belonged in the room. Some of the rags she burned had been taken up to mop up the carpet. The sergeant took possession of the charred rags. They had nothing to do with Miss O'Reilly, but were old rags kept in the kitchen for household purposes. Witness generally did most of the laundry for the other girls but sometimes they did things of their own or gave her a hand. Agnes O'Reilly had been washing some things that morning, but she had said she would be doing so the day before as she wanted clean things for Sunday. She did not know how many nightdresses Agnes had but she had washed one for her that week. She had not noticed bloodstains on the things Agnes was washing and she was with her all the time in the washhouse as she was so upset and did not want to be left alone although she tried to get on with her work as if nothing had happened.

Superintendent Bryant stated that the pocket-knife had been sent to the analyst and no blood had been found on it.

Constable Cleer said that on the morning of June 20th about 5 a.m. he overhauled a man near the railway station. The man was a

stranger to him and had on a dark grey suit with a lighter check running through it. He said he came from Staines and was going to Windsor to see his wife. He could identify the man. Witness had heard the story of a man running down the street towards the railway. The description was like that of the man he saw but the man was not running and was coming away from the railway. Witness made enquiries and found that the man's story was true.

Cross-examined, witness said that the down train did not start till 6.30 a.m. Witness had often known men who did not know the time run in that way. As there was so long to wait for a train the man said it would be quicker to walk and he might find someone to give him a lift.

The Court was then adjourned until the following day. Agnes O'Reilly was afterwards taken before the police magistrate and remanded. It was common knowledge in the Court and village by this time that the Coroner considered the proceedings irregular and had protested, but that Superintendent Bryant was determined that the case should be conducted to suit him and that consequently the tension between Coroner and police was acute. It added piquancy to a case already strange enough to have captured public interest and to have divided onlookers into two hostile camps.

"A sordid story," said Brown of the *Wail*

disgustedly as he lounged into the bar. "I wish they would hurry on with the evidence, most of it seems irrelevent and is given as if the unfortunate girl was actually on trial. The Coroner is right; it is all darned irregular, and why the devil are the police so prejudiced against the girl with so little evidence against her. Got anything up their sleeves, I wonder."

"It seems jolly mysterious to me," interposed young Robinson. "The evidence against the girl O'Reilly seems to turn on a missing nightgown which would obviously have been covered with gore since she propped the dead girl up. Why are they so keen on it?"

"She might have wiped the knife on it, I suppose; that would have left a tell-tale mark. And, anyway, the fact that it cannot be found looks rather suspicious, as if she did not want anyone to see it."

"Oh I don't know. I doubt whether she realised that she was suspected so early. She probably wanted to get rid of the mess as soon as posible."

"It' a beastly bluggy tale," said Jimmy Smith with a frown. "Come out for a walk, Brown? I want some fresh air after that foul Court room."

The two men walked for some time in silence, puffing thoughtfully at their pipes.

"I want to walk round by the bridge, Hugh," said Smith suddenly. "I've got to give evidence to-morrow and there's something I should like to know first."

"Can you throw any fresh light on it?" Brown asked.

Smith shook his head. "Not a glimmer," he said gravely. "Not what the court would consider light at least. But there is something I would like to know on my own account, to see if it fits in with a theory I'm beginning to form."

"Let's have it," pleaded Brown.

"Not till I have more to go on. I don't want to be labelled mad."

The two men reached the bridge and stopped in the middle of it. Leaning over the parapet they looked down on the windows of the "Anglers' Rest" glimmering faintly in the twilight. Smith produced pencil and a sheet of paper and began to draw a plan.

"A man couldn't have jumped from this Bridge to that window sill, if that is what you are trying to work out," said Brown sardonically.

Smith went on drawing. "No, a man couldn't," he said calmly.

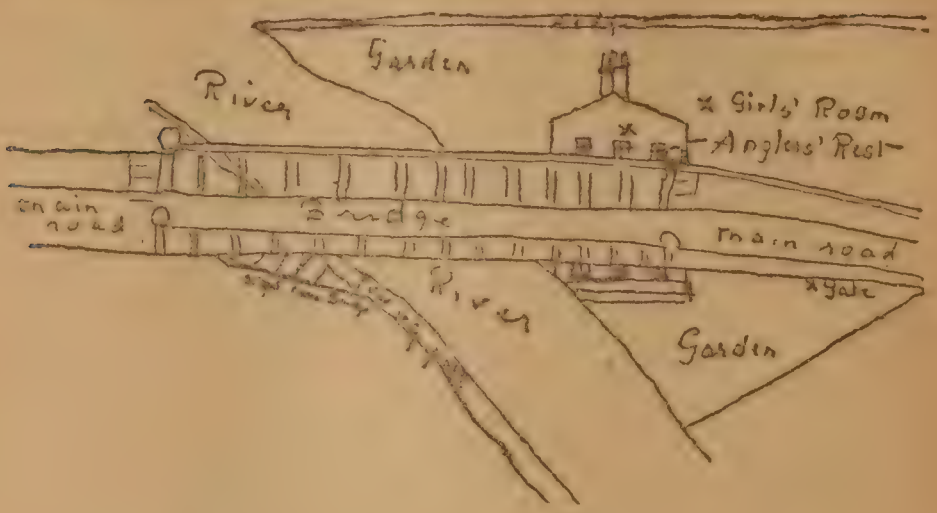
"Well, certainly a woman couldn't," Brown retorted.

"Nor a child either," said Jimmy tranquilly. "In fact only a cat—or a bird—or perhaps a ball."

"Well, cats, birds and balls don't murder young women," Brown grinned. "You'd better take more water with it, Jimmy."

Smith made no reply but went on with his drawing. The finished sketch, done very rough-

ly by a man who had no talent for the job, looked something like this



Brown watched, puffing at his pipe meditatively, but as the sketch became recognisable his interest increased.

"Good God, Jimmy. If the girl had been killed by a bullet I should see what you are driving at, but a knife can't inflict a wound and vanish or return to the hand of a thrower from a distance. It's the absence of a weapon which I find so baffling. . . . Lawn and river were searched before anyone had time to hide it even if they got it out of the room, and the theory you are drawing necessitates an accomplice."

"An unwilling one perhaps," said Jimmy, cooly folding the sketch. "It's the *kind* of weapon which is the snag as far as I am concerned, and also the motive. I feel fairly

certain about the identity of the murderer and the method of the crime."

"And you're going to keep a pal in the dark?" Brown asked reproachfully.

"For the present, Hugh. There's something very odd here and I want to get to the bottom of it. Arrests and things like that would dry up the source of information. If only I could get a word out of Agnes," he said regretfully.

"I shall have to ferret it out for myself," said Brown with some resentment.

"Good luck to you," Jimmy replied cheerfully.

But James Smith gave no sign of having more than a casual interest in the case when he gave his evidence in Court.

Francis James Smith, journalist, was his description in the official proceedings. He stated that he had been a frequent visitor at the "Anglers' Rest" during the past year and knew the two girls well, but only in relation to their domestic duties. He had not at any time had private conversation with either of them. About 4 o'clock on the morning of June 20th he had heard Mr. Norton cry, "Miss Davids has broken a blood-vessel." Witness then heard a knocking and a woman's voice crying, "Poor Judy. Poor Judy. She has broken a blood-vessel." Witness went downstairs a few seconds later and saw Mr. Frost at the telephone. He went back to the door of Number 16 and saw Mrs. Huxham and Norton in there. The blind was partly drawn and was rattling a little in

the wind, by which he supposed that the window was open. Mrs. Huxham was at the head of the bed and was saying, "Oh Heavens, this is awful. It is a case of murder or suicide."

Witness could see Judith Davids lying on the bed and that she was still alive, but blood was flowing from a wound in her throat. He waited on guard at the door until the doctor and the police came in order to prevent people going into the room. As far as he knew Norton was the only man who had entered the room after the alarm had been given. He saw no weapon or anything suspicious on the part of anyone which might have led him to suppose they were concealing a weapon. Witness showed the doctor a footprint in blood on the floor. Norton said "That must be mine," and showed witness the bloodstained sole of his foot.

So far as he knew nothing had been disturbed when he went to the door of the room; nothing had been taken out of it during his vigil, and when Mrs. Huxham had gone to draw up the blind he suggested that she should leave it as it was until the police came. She had done so. Agnes O'Reilly was not in the room when he stationed himself there, but she came a few minutes later from Mrs. Huxham's bedroom and asked him to give her her stockings. He did not do so as he thought it would be a mistake for anyone else to go into the room and obliterate any possible marks on the floor. Agnes spoke to him several times but did not

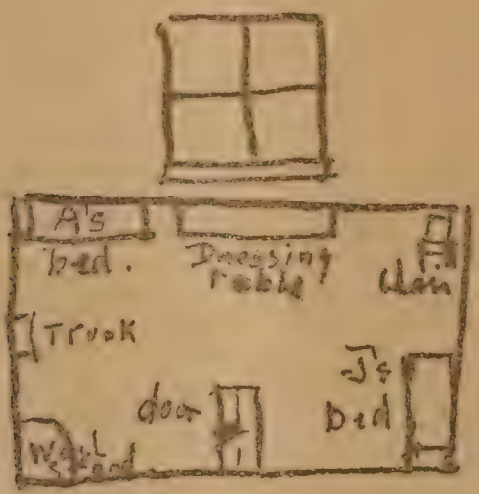
ask for her stockings again although he noticed later that she must have borrowed a pair from one of the other girls. . . . The tears were running down her cheeks and she kept saying, "Oh poor Judy. Poor Judy."

To Mr. Claverton: The two girls were to the best of his belief very great friends.

The next witness was Police-Constable Stark. In answer to a telephone call, he said, he went to the "Anglers' Rest" soon after 5 o'clock on the morning of June 20th. He found Dr. Thorne and Superintendent Bryant already there. He did not know who had telephoned but it was a man's voice. He had since identified it as that of Mr. Frost who had already called up the Superintendent half an hour before. On a low bedstead to the right of the door he saw the body of Judith Davids lying on its back with a deep irregular-shaped wound in the throat. The body was covered with bedclothes nearly to the waist. The nightdress and sheet seemed covered with blood.

The right arm was hanging over the side of the bed. There was a great deal of blood on the floor spattered a long way from the bed, it reached as far as a mat which was in the centre of the room. There were two small tracks of bare feet in the blood near the bed. The tracks pointed towards the door and were both women's footprints. He had since identified them as belonging to Mrs. Huxham and Agnes O'Reilly. A larger footprint near the

middle of the room belonged to Harold Norton but was quite out of reach of the bed. The blind was half drawn, torn at the side and crooked. The window was nearly half open at the bottom. He saw nothing else deranged in the room except the other bed which had evidently been slept on, and the bedclothes were half on the floor as if the occupant had left it very hurriedly. Witness then asked for Miss O'Reilly. When she came in witness asked, "Did you sleep here last night?" She said "yes." Witness said "Where?" and she pointed to the bed under the window. The position of the furniture in the room was like this



Witness asked: "When did you wake up?" And she said, "I did not look at the clock but the sun was coming in. I heard a gurgling sound as if someone were snoring. I looked over towards Judy's bed and saw a man

standing there. I sat up in bed and screamed. He appeared to have her by the arm. I jumped out of bed and went towards Judy and the man sprang past me and I saw him sideface. He went towards the window, jumped on to the sill and got out sideways, his back turned towards me." Witness asked: "What kind of man was he?" Miss O'Reilly said, "He was a medium-sized man, clean shaven and dressed in a grey suit." (In answer to the Coroner): He had not warned Miss O'Reilly before he questioned her. As far as he knew there was not, at that time, any suspicion attaching to her.

The Coroner (angrily): Very irregular.

Witness went on to say that Doctor Thorne and Superintendent Bryant were both present when he questioned O'Reilly. He asked her: "Did the man have a hat, boots or anything else in his hand?" She said she could not say, she was too intent on Judy, who was making a terrible moaning sound. He then asked: "What made you think she had broken a bloodvessel?" and she said, "Because there was so much blood on the bed. I did not at first think of the man in connection with it. There was no one who could possibly want to hurt poor Judy." Witness then examined the window carefully for finger-prints or marks made by anyone climbing through the window. He examined both inside and out. The dust was on the wooden sill and also on the stone ledge outside. He could not see anywhere that the dust had been disturbed.

There was a fairly high wind blowing, but it would not have blown the dust on the window sill about enough to obliterate all marks in so short a time. There were no finger-prints except on the inside of the window-frame which had been identified as those of the dead girl and Agnes O'Reilly. There were three deep scratches on the outer ledge evidently made quite recently, but dust was in them. Superintendent Bryant also looked. Miss O'Reilly gave Superintendent Bryant exactly the same account that she had given him. She said that the window was up when she awoke and the door locked. The blind half down and pulled to one side. It had been quite down, she said, when they went to bed. She did not remember any conversation about a blind the night before. (Someone—he thought it was Mr. Norton—had told him of the remark called out). Superintendent Bryant had asked her what nightclothes she wore and she answered a white cambric nightgown but she did not remember what she had done with it. Everything stained had been put in the laundry basket, she thought. No nightgown belonging to O'Reilly which had been used could be found. Later in the day two nightgowns of hers which had been washed were found in her trunk.

Witness then left the "Anglers' Rest" and went to see Tom Williams. That was about 6 o'clock. Williams came to the door in dark trousers and a blue shirt. He said he was just going to wash. Witness said: "Before

you do that let me have a look at your hands." There was no trace of blood on his hands, on finger-nails or clothes. His father said he had called him at half-past five and the boy was then in bed asleep, where he had been since before midnight the night before. A brother who slept in the same room confirmed that. Witness asked Williams to finish dressing and come with him to the "Anglers' Rest." On the way Williams said: "What's up? A burglary or something?" Witness said: "Something serious has happened. Do you know a girl called Davids." He said, "Yes. For God's sake don't tell me anything is wrong with her." Witness said: "When were you last in her company?" Williams said, "I left her last night about 11 o'clock at the gate of the 'Anglers' Rest.'" Witness did not tell him then what had happened. At the hotel witness took Williams into Room 16.

He was terribly distressed when he learnt what had happened. In answer to a question from Superintendent Bryant Williams said he and the girl parted good friends. He had kissed her and wished her good night. He had returned to his home about 11.15 and had not left it until witness called for him. He identified a ring which had been found under her pillow as the one he had given her. Witness then went to Miss O'Reilly and asked her if the bedroom blind were torn when she went to bed the night before. She said "No. It was torn this morning." Witness asked if she or deceased

pulled the blind down the night before. She said she did. The blind was thin and it was possible for anyone standing on the bridge to see into the room if it was not fully drawn. She always pulled it down to the bottom of the window. She was quite sure she did not hear any joke about the blind. She had come into the room after Judy, but before Judy had begun to undress. They had had no quarrel then or at any time. On the contrary, they were both exceptionally happy and had talked and laughed before they went to sleep.

Joe Levy, the young man to whom she was engaged, had never seen or spoken to Judy. After he had left her he had returned to London on his motor-bicycle. She had waited to hear him start. There were in the room, she went on, two bedsteads, washstand and dressing-table. The bed in which she, O'Reilly, slept was partly under the window, the head of it about sixteen inches from the wall. The dressing-table was also under the window about eight inches from the foot of her bed. The dressing-table was covered with things. There was a cover on it which witness produced in court. There was a speck or two of blood on it and a mark on the outside corner near the window. Witness could not say what this mark was but thought it might have been the mark of grease from a candle. It certainly was not a footprint. Witness then produced a pillow-slip with bloodstains on it. This he

said he took off a pillow on the bed Miss O'Reilly said she slept in. The pillow-slip did not look as if it had been lain on. Witness said he had forgotten to say that Miss O'Reilly told him that when she got out of bed she had gone and touched deceased on the arm. She touched something that felt like blood and ran to call Mr. Norton to go for a doctor and Mrs. Huxham to see what could be done, as she thought Judy had broken a bloodvessel. When she told Mrs. Huxham the latter said, "You go back to the room and hold Judy up. I'll be there in a minute." Judy was then in a half-sitting position with her face turned towards the wall and was trying to speak but no words, only a terrible gasping, would come. Miss O'Reilly said she had sat on the bed and put her arms on Judy's shoulders and turned her round.

She did not remember whether she had laid the deceased back on her bed before Mrs. Huxham had come. She saw no weapon. She did not remember whether someone had led her out of the room or if she had walked by herself. The shock had been so dreadful that she moved as if she were in a dream. She went to Mrs. Huxham's room and as soon as she was able she dressed. She did not remember who had handed her clothes out to her but thought it was Mrs. Huxham. Judy had been trying terribly hard to speak, but there was only a gurgle and she could not make out what she was trying to say. She was waving her arms and pointing to the window. The

Superintendent asked Miss O'Reilly in witness's presence if the man she saw climbing through the window was Tom Williams, and she said, "No. A stranger."

In answer to a question by Mr. Claverton: The key had still been in the door when he entered the room. It was in an upright position on the inside of the door. There were no finger-prints on it except those of the two girls. He had tried other keys to see if they fitted the door and he found that the keys of both bathroom and kitchen would have opened the door of the room occupied by the two girls. Both keys had been in their right locks, however.

In answer to a question by Superintendent Bryant: The dust would certainly have been disturbed if a man had touched it.

The Coroner: That is a question for the jury.

Witness, continuing, said that he searched thoroughly for other stained clothes but found none. There were plenty of knives in the kitchen, which was open when he arrived, but nothing seemed to have been disturbed; none of them had jagged edges and all of them were clean. Mrs. Huxham said the kitchen had not been locked that night. Witness then examined the lawn below the window of Number 16. There was no sign of footsteps or of a ladder. Mr. Smith who was with him had pointed out some dark stains on the grass by the river and marks of muddy footsteps, but that was

over a hundred yards from the house just on the edge of the river bank by the landing-stage where the punt was moored. There were no marks leading from the window to the river and the punt had not been touched. He had taken an impression of the footprint on the river bank, but it had been a stockinged foot; the impression was very slight. Early morning bathers were very common at that time of year. There was no sign of a weapon which could have made the wound in deceased's throat either in the house or in the garden.

He had looked carefully to see if the ground had been disturbed in any place but had not found anything. Miss O'Reilly had not left the house between the discovery of the crime and witness's arrival. She had not been downstairs except for about two minutes when she went to get brandy from the dining-room. There were too many people about for her to have done so without being observed. The second time he questioned her witness said he took a written statement from her in the presence of Constable Brunt. Brunt wrote it down. Witness asked her if she would give him a statement. She said "Yes." Witness then warned her that it might be given in evidence against her and that it might be given voluntarily. She made no objection. The statement which was then read repeated the story which O'Reilly had already told the Superintendent and the constable.

Sergeant Frank then gave evidence that he

had found a leather purse containing two treasury notes and some silver, a wristlet-watch, several brooches and trinkets in the dressing-table drawer. O'Reilly said they were not hers. There was no sign of theft or of anything missing. That was why he thought it ought to be mentioned. A brooch, a gold watch, a gold chain and a ring were in a wooden box under the table. Miss O'Reilly said they were hers. Witness gave them to her and she at once put on the ring.

To the Coroner: An active person could get out through the window, but no one who was not active and slim. It would be harder to get in through the window—impossible, in fact, he thought—without a rope or a ladder. There were no marks of either.

The next witness, Mary Macintyre, a very old lady who said she was eighty years of age and married, stated that she was up about daylight on the morning of June 20th. Her house was the last one before you came to the bridge, on the opposite side of the river from the "Anglers' Rest" and just above the towing-path. It was hardly light and she heard a queer noise outside. She could not describe it properly because it was a sound she had never heard before—like a sharp humming noise. It could not have been an aeroplane because the noise did not last more than a second. She looked out of the window but did not see anything.

She heard her little grandson call out and

went to him, stopping to give him a drink. When she came back to her own room, perhaps five minutes later, she heard footsteps on the towing-path and looked out of her window. She saw a man running past. He was running very fast. He wore dark clothes, shabby as far as she could see, and seemed to have a dark coloured cap on, pulled down well over his face. She did not see his features. He was not a tall man and yet not very small. He could not have been an old man by the way he was running. He had a long thin stick, bent almost like a half circle, under his arm. It might have been a fishing-rod. She could not identify him if she saw him again.

Superintendent Bryant asked for an adjournment to suit the jury and the Coroner. There might be three or four more witnesses, but he thought the enquiry could be finished in a day.

The Coroner: "I do not wish to keep this unfortunate girl in prison."

The Foreman of the Jury: "We have felt that all the time, your worship."

Agnes O'Reilly, who was in Court, seemed very weak and could hardly walk. In the police court afterwards she was remanded for three days and sent to the prison infirmary.

"Confirmed your theory yet?" Brown asked Jimmy Smith sarcastically as they strolled over the bridge after dinner that evening.

"Oh it is being confirmed all the time but I cannot yet see light where I want it," Jimmy retorted. "Anyway, you seem to have changed

your mind about a murdered servant girl not providing a *cause celébre,*" he said ironically.

"Mm," Brown answered thoughtfully. "The point seems to be that she wasn't a servant girl."

"Speculation my boy, speculation. Nothing seems to be proved except that Agnes is in a nasty fix. It's a queer thing the way people seem to go on leading commonplace lives and appearing to be exceedingly ordinary and uninteresting, yet directly some close investigation of their private histories becomes necessary nearly everyone seems to have a secret, something they desperately want to hide. My life would not bear probing into. Would yours?"

"I'd rather it didn't become necessary," Brown confessed with some embarrassment. "The life of a crime reporter leads him into strange company, and nobody's morals are proof against really vigorous temptation as far as I've observed. This girl Agnes, for instance, I can't for the life of me swallow her story about the man and the window. The police seem dead sure she did it and the Coroner and jurymen equally sure that she didn't."

"Oh, well, the police are like you, you know. So used to crime they always suspect the worst at once about anyone caught in an incriminating situation. Coroners and jurymen are more used to meeting decent people."

"It seems so motiveless," Brown went on musingly. "She's such a slip of a girl to make such a particularly gory mess. But if she didn't who the devil did?"

"You heard the scoffing way in which the police referred to my efforts to place clues in their hands, and the derision with which the evidence of an old lady of eighty who heard a strange noise and saw a stranger running fast at a very peculiar time of the morning was received?"

"Well eighty, somehow, seems to be too old to spot what no one else has noticed, but the old lady's evidence seems to confirm the girl's story. I didn't attach much importance to the marks you saw on the river bank. Anyone in a boat or a punt might have pulled in to the bank for a minute, and whoever it was didn't come any nearer the house."

"Still the time during which those foot-prints could have been made was a very short one. They were well below high tide mark. Also the dark marks on the grass which they disregarded were bloodstains. There were only spatters and had dried in the sun naturally, but from the roots of the grass where it was still damp exploring fingers came away red."

"Why the devil didn't you emphasise the fact then instead of being so infernally casual about it?"

"Well it might not have been poor Judith's blood, and if it was it supports my theory that the murderer never entered the house, which everybody would regard as preposterous. No one would listen to my idea of the method in which the crime was committed. It is too farfetched."

"Yes, but the weapon, my dear chap? If it had been a bullet it would have been as clear as daylight. There is no such thing as a boomerang knife, is there? And, anyway, no man could possibly be skilful enough to throw so far and so accurately."

"If I could only hit on a possible motive," Jimmy went on thoughtfully. "How the deuce can one make the Mother Superior of a Convent cough up what she knows. How did Judy find her way into that Convent in Normandy? How far is Agnes involved? She says 'a man in a grey suit,' the old lady says 'a man in a dark suit,' and I'll bet the old lady is right. Of course, in the ordinary way, I should say that Agnes was shielding her lover, but not only is there no one who can contradict the statement that he never either saw or spoke to Judy but his *alibi* is without a flaw. He left here soon after 11 p.m. on his motor-bike, a dozen people saw him. He stopped at a garage in Staines for petrol—three people can identify him; a policeman took his number in Hammersmith for exceeding the speed limit, and three more people swear that he reached his home in London and was in bed by 2 o'clock in a room which he shares with a cousin, who swears he did not leave it again until 7 o'clock the next morning. He is dark and has a beard, and he was dressed in a khaki-coloured motor-cycling outfit, though perhaps he had an ordinary suit underneath. He is completely ruled out as far as I can see."

"The girl must have had some clandestine acquaintance then."

"I don't think so," said Smith thoughtfully. "She was very seldom out of the hotel and everyone who knew her says emphatically that she never went out alone. She had the sense of propriety of a Convent-bred French girl of the strictest kind. Also, I have a pretty shrewd suspicion that she was afraid of being by herself."

"The key to the mystery might lie in that if you are right."

"So I think. She was afraid of someone or something—but it was a fear which had its roots in a distant past."

"Isn't there any means of finding out where she came from?"

"None as far as I can see. You cannot force a Mother Superior of a Convent to give information which she swears she has not got."

"Well," Brown said slowly. "Crime's my job and the more mysterious it is the better story it makes for my paper. But I have never known you interested in it before."

Jimmy Smith took his pipe out of his mouth and tapped it gently against the parapet of the bridge.

"There's some elusive bit of knowledge in my head," he said slowly and with a queer effect of solemnity. "Haven't you ever had that feeling? Somewhere inside your head, behind the thinnest of shutters, is something which you know you know, but which for the moment

eludes you. I shall remember presently what it is that is haunting me. It may, of course, be of no importance but I've an idea that something about Judith Davids was vaguely familiar. Something she said or did which I did not notice at the time has lingered in my subconscious memory and will presently come to the surface and supply the missing clue."

IV

But Jimmy Smith had not succeeded in striking that dumb chord of memory when the inquest was resumed. Public excitement had died down a little. So far there had been no further sensational developments to follow on the original excitement and the conviction was gradually spreading that the story told by Agnes O'Reilly was true. Why did not the police find the man? What were the police for? They persecuted an innocent and helpless girl and let the trail of the criminal get cold while they did nothing to find him. This was the burden, for the most part, of the conversational hum in the courtroom before the Coroner appeared and Dr. Thorne, recalled to give further evidence, threw a bombshell into the midst of Agnes O'Reilly's partisans. Dr. Fellows, sitting in the back of the Court, liked his colleague less than ever as he marked the air of subdued triumph with which the younger man gave his evidence.

"From certain indications," said Dr. Thorne, "and from questions put to O'Reilly, he was of opinion that she was in a certain condition. The majority of women were, to a certain extent, upset in those circumstances. Witness wished to add to his former evidence that deceased had on the lower part of her body a calico, or lawn he believed it was called, nightdress. That was bloodstained but not torn. There was no evidence of any other injury to the body."

To the Coroner: "There was only one wound, that was in the throat, irregular and torn at the edges, three-quarters of an inch at the deepest. If deceased had a weapon the wound could not, in his opinion, be self-inflicted. There was no sign of a possible weapon in the room. There was blood on the thighs and sprayed bloodstains as far as the toes."

The Coroner: "How could that be so if she were found half covered with the bedclothes?"

Witness: "She cannot have been covered by the bedclothes. It is an impossibility. She must have been uncovered by the clothes when the wound was inflicted. They must have been drawn up afterwards. The upper sheet and blankets were practically unstained."

Coroner: "How do you account for her having got back into bed after being wounded like that?"

Witness: "I do not think she was out of

bed. She was uncovered by the bedclothes, but on the bed."

Coroner: "Someone, then, must have partially covered her after the wound was inflicted?"

Witness: "Undoubtedly."

Coroner: "And the nightdress? How do you account for that being partially off?"

Witness: "Someone might have pulled it down to see the extent of the injury?"

Coroner: "She could not have done that herself?"

Witness: "It is just possible, or it is possible that she had not put it on properly. The night of June 19th was exceedingly hot."

Coroner: "But you think it absolutely certain that someone else pulled up the bed-clothes?"

Witness: "I do. The nightdress was stained, the bedclothes were not. There was blood all over the walls near the bed, evidently made by the deceased with her hands after the wound had been inflicted. But though the sprayed blood was all over her legs and gown there was only one mark on the clothes. Taking these facts together, he concluded that the girl must have been lying uncovered on the bed, almost certainly asleep. The one bloodstain on the bed was where the body was lying."

Coroner: "There was so sign of a struggle?"

Witness: "None whatever. The girl was taken completely unawares."

Coroner: "There is no possibility of the wound being self inflicted?"

Witness: "In my opinion none whatever. There was more force behind it than a girl lying in that position could possibly have used. Great force must have been used for the wound to be so deep. Also I looked at once for a weapon and found nothing. You naturally look for a weapon in a case like this. It is to nobody's interest to remove the weapon in a case of suicide."

The next witness was Superintendent Bryant (police officer in charge of the district) who said that Agnes O'Reilly had been taken into custody on Sunday at about 4 o'clock in the evening and was formally charged on Monday before the magistrates.

The Coroner (sharply): "I want to point to the jury that I ordered at the beginning of this hearing that all witnesses were to leave the Court. The superintendent of police, the local constable, and Mr. Smith have all been present while others were giving their evidence."

Superintendent Bryant: "There had to be someone to conduct the case."

The Coroner: "It is all very irregular. It was in direct opposition to my order. I wish the jury and the police to know exactly how to receive the evidence of these persons."

Superintendent Bryant: "I think everyone knows I am a man, your worship." (Titters ruffled the tension of the Court.)

The Coroner (sharply): "Go on with your evidence please."

Witness said that he went to the "Anglers' Rest" between 4 and 5 o'clock on the morning of June 20th. Someone, he had since discovered it to be Mr. Frost, called him up on the telephone and asked him to come at once as a murder had been committed. Witness then recounted the conversation he had had with Agnes O'Reilly at that time. The account which she gave was the same as that which had several times been deposed to in the court. Witness asked her how the window was when she awoke? She said it was wide open and the blind had been torn away to one side. When he arrived the window was only half open, but he could not discover who had partly closed it. When asked if she objected to taking off her clothes for their examination she merely said, "Must I undress in your presence?" She was allowed to do so in the presence of the doctor only.

Witness said he had carefully examined the window-ledge for blood marks or any signs of anyone having climbed through it but had found nothing except the finger-marks of the two girls who occupied the room and evidently made in the ordinary course of opening and shutting the window. The window was half open when he examined it and he had formed the opinion that it would have been just possible for a slim person to climb through. Asked how it was she was not more stained with blood when holding deceased up Miss O'Reilly said

she was sitting on the bed holding her up on the opposite side from where the wound was. Witness asked her if she had a knife. She said "Yes" and at once produced one from a drawer. It was the one already exhibited in Court.

Questioned as to the clothes she wore she said, "I took Judy's grey coat down from behind the door and put it on when I went to call Mrs. Huxham. Dr. Thorne examined her hands, he also examined the grey coat and said, "Why, there is blood on that." She said, "Yes, I put it on without thinking that my hands had touched poor Judy." Witness made search for a nightdress but it had not been found up to the present. Search had also been made for a knife in the room, in the garden, in the river and throughout the house but no knife or sharp weapon of any kind with any sort of stain on it beyond the one in court had been found. The knife had been sent to the analyst and returned with the report that the stains were not blood.

Witness, continuing, said that he had asked Miss O'Reilly how the door was when she woke up. She said it was locked. There were two bare feet tracks near the head of the bed of the deceased and numbers of others marked with blood about the floor, evidently caused by the people in the house moving about in the room as they all had been identified. There would be considerable difficulty in getting through the window without leaving marks but none in getting through the door if it were unlocked.

Behind Agnes O'Reilly's bed there was hung a curtain as a kind of make-shift wardrobe; there was another behind the bed of the deceased.

Coroner: "Could a man take shelter there."

Witness: "It is possible."

Coroner: "I mean would there be room there for a man to conceal himself completely?"

Witness: "A very small man. Not one of my size."

In answer to Mr. Claverton: He had changed his mind as to the difficulty of getting through the window. It was not impossible. A man might have a step-ladder, but he did not see how he could have carried it away in daylight without being seen by someone and it would certainly have left marks in the earth below the window. There was a tin trunk in the room. He made a thorough search in the room but did not turn the contents of the trunk out.

Mr. Claverton: "Would you be surprised to know that Miss O'Reilly got a torn night-dress out of that trunk before going to the gaol and that she is wearing it now?"

Witness: "I do not know it. Constable Brunt and I looked through that box and neither of us saw any nightdress, either torn or soiled."

Mr. Claverton: "Yet you acknowledge that you did not turn the trunk out. It was full of clothes and by merely turning them over you would be quite likely to miss things,

especially as at that time you were not sure what you were looking for."

Witness: "She was half dressed. I did not see a nightdress on her bed. There were bedclothes and an eiderdown quilt. It was possible that it was there."

Superintendent Bryant here said that he had another statement, but before calling the witness he would like the Coroner to read the statement. He did not wish to muddle anyone else in connection with the affair.

The Coroner having read the statement asked Superintendent Bryant if he saw any reason for calling this witness.

Bryant: "None, your worship, except that he can explain where he was after 11 o'clock and call witnesses to prove his statements."

Coroner: "He does not seem to have anything to do with it. There is no suspicion attaching to him in any way. He seems to have been mentioned simply because he has two or three grey suits."

Superintendent Bryant: "The only reason is that Miss O'Reilly——"

Mr. Claverton (interrupting): "My instructions are that she told the police nothing about anyone—simply accounted for her own movements."

Coroner (shortly): "I say that there is no need to bring him in at all. No suspicion attaches to him."

Superintendent Bryant: "Those are all the witnesses I have at present, but I have a

telegram. I should like your worship to adjourn until two o'clock, and then perhaps if you would see fit for two or three weeks in order to give us a chance of clearing the case up."

Mr. Claverton objected to any long adjournment.

The Coroner: "You don't object to the adjournment until two o'clock? You have not seen this telegram. For all you know it might be of the greatest assistance to you."

Superintendent Bryant: "I should like a certain thing done before Mr. Claverton sees that telegram."

The Coroner: "Oh, I am not going to show it to him. I shall adjourn until two o'clock."

In the Court and outside, in the bars and round the tea tables, the buzz of comment rose and fell. Who was the mysterious witness whom the Coroner refused to call? A mistake thought Jimmy Smith. Not, of course, that the witness would have spoken the truth, or that the fact that he possessed two or three grey suits would have helped to throw any light on the puzzle. Whatever suit the murderer had had on, Jimmy was absolutely convinced that it was not grey.

To any reasonable person, said the sensation-mongers, there seemed no room for doubt as to Agnes O'Reilly's guilt. The motive which hitherto had been lacking had been amply supplied by Dr. Thorne's evidence. Why it was clear as daylight; the unfortunate Judith had discovered the secret which the other girl

had tried to hide and had threatened to tell; the girl Agnes, who admittedly had a sudden fiery temper, had gone for her with a knife—not meaning to kill, probably, but meaning to frighten her companion so seriously that she would not dare to tell. The only thing now was to find the knife.

Jimmy Smith listened to his neighbours in the luncheon room in grim silence. Whether Agnes were acquitted or condemned now would make little difference to the public view of her; she had forfeited the sympathy of the public in general and of her own sex in particular. As he was about to re-enter the Court he turned to Dr. Fellows and whispered savagely: "If she is found guilty they'll want to lynch her. If she is acquitted they will give her an ovation but in neither case will anyone believe her to be innocent. Except, of course, us and the jury and the Coroner. And I wonder why the devil there is all this friction between the Coroner and the police. The proceedings are, as his worship remarked, extraordinarily irregular."

The afternoon's proceedings turned largely on the position of Agnes O'Reilly who was charged before the police magistrates on the suspicion of the murder of Judith Davids and was detained in custody on that charge. She was not before the Coroner's Court at all and counsel argued that a great deal of inadmissible evidence had been given. After the adjournment Superintendent Bryant said that after all he had no further evidence but he would

like to suggest to his worship that there was this girl Agnes O'Reilly, who had been in Room 16 when the murder had been committed. Was she to be called as a witness? If not, he would like an adjournment for eight or ten days to make enquiries. Unless the police were given sufficient time they could not do so properly.

Mr. Claverton: "My client is perfectly willing to go into the witness-box if desired but I think it is unfair to make her go into the box before all the known evidence has been given. If this adjournment is going to be granted there is no reason why she should not wait and give her evidence after the end of the police evidence. As it is there is not a shadow of a case against the girl. I do not think she should have been arrested. All her cross-examination has gone to back up her original story; it had been impossible to shake her on any essential point. I know the ends of justice have to be met, but why should she have been kept in custody all this time? She is perfectly willing to repeat her story in the witness-box. I cannot make an application for her to be released but there is a way, if the police wish to take it, by which it can be arrived at. I most sincerely protest against any adjournment."

The Coroner to Superintendent Byrant: "Your request is that this case should be adjourned for seven or eight days?"

Superintendent Bryant: "Yes, your worship."

The Coroner to the Jury: "Mr. Foreman, you have heard the evidence. If you want me to address you I am willing to do so. But I can take this from you. Are you of opinion that there is sufficient evidence to justify this girl being kept in custody? She is not, strictly speaking, before you, but if you think there is not enough evidence you can say so. I approached the Superintendent and told him that if he thought the case was a weak one he could withdraw it, but he did not feel inclined to do that."

The Jury retired for a few moments. On their return the foreman said: "The jury are of opinion that there is not enough evidence to warrant Agnes O'Reilly being kept in custody any longer."

There was handclapping and an attempt at cheering at the back of the Court when this opinion was heard.

Coroner: "I told you the girl was not before this Court. The case is now in the hands of the police."

The Coroner then summed up the evidence:

"Dr. Thorne has informed you that the deceased died from having her jugular vein severed. The fact was first made known by screams that were heard at daybreak on June 20th by Mr. Norton. He heard screams and then someone moaning. Several people appeared on the scene almost at once. Agnes O'Reilly had rushed from the room, knocked on the doors of Mr. Frost and Mrs. Huxham

screaming, 'Judy has broken a bloodvessel.' The first person into the room was Mr. Norton; he did not stay a second, but long enough to see that there was blood and that the injured girl was still alive and waving her hands about. The girl Agnes O'Reilly returned immediately afterwards with Mrs. Huxham. There is no evidence of her having been anywhere else or of having an opportunity to hide a weapon in any place other than Room 16. From the moment she ran from the room screaming she was under the observation of somebody until after the police had made a thorough search of the house and garden. She gave a straightforward answer to all the questions put to her and did not contradict herself on any important point. She told them what she had on and what she did with the clothes which she took off.

"The nightdress for which the police made search was, she said, in the linen basket and was washed later in the day before the police thought of asking about it but not before they looked. She was a good-natured girl, for she gave a nightgown to a girl in hospital though she herself was not well supplied. There was no one who had come forward to confirm her story of the man in the grey suit, but at 4 o'clock in the morning there were exceedingly few people about and a witness had given evidence as to a strange man on the towing-path. That man had neither come forward nor had he yet been traced and questioned. Possibly he could

throw some light on the subject. It was possible for an active man to get in and out of the window—a high wind was blowing which might obliterate marks on the window-ledge. Miss O'Reilly had said that he placed a coat or a sack on the ledge before he jumped on to it. No weapon has been found. It was obviously an unusually shaped weapon with a jagged edge. There was the knife produced in Court on which the analysis's report was 'no blood.' If the man did it he would have been able to get away with the knife. Gentlemen of the Jury, you have to find who did it. If you do not know who did it, you must return an open verdict. Did the girl under suspicion shirk replying to anything she was asked? Gentlemen of the Jury consider your verdict."

A little stir ran around the court as the jury filed out but no one left his seat and the hum of voices was very subdued. The jury were only absent for five minutes and brought in an unanimous verdict: "That the deceased, Judith Davids, was wilfully murdered by some person or persons unknown but there is no evidence before the jury to say by whom."

The Court emptied itself of an eagerly arguing and gesticulating crowd. They had, of course, after the Coroner's summing-up, expected no other verdict.

After an angry scene between the Coroner and the Superintendent Agnes O'Reilly was remanded for a week at the police court.

The sharp disagreement between Coroner

and police was reflected in the village, in the Press, throughout the country in fact. "Was Agnes O'Reilly guilty?" became the burning topic of the hour.

The police enquiry during the interval brought to light no fresh evidence. No trace of the man on the tow-path or of anyone who had seen him, except the old lady of eighty, could be found. Two men running at four o'clock in the morning and only seen by two persons, one of whom declared he was dressed in a grey suit and the other that he had on a dark suit and a cap drawn well over his face—the police were frankly incredulous and decided that the tale was an invention on the part of Agnes and a hallucination on the part of the old lady. But any possible conclusive evidence was out of the question until the weapon had been found. Agnes O'Reilly was released, but the village of Shells knew her no more. She quickly hid her uncomfortable identity with a wedding-ring and although the police kept an eye on the newly-made Mrs. Joe Levy they discovered nothing fresh or helpful. The young man had done the right thing and stood by her in spite of the public disgrace. The notorious Agnes O'Reilly became an insignificant matron in one of the outer suburbs.

V

Public interest in the murder at Shells died away and, as time passed, the efforts of the

police to trace the unknown man and the hidden weapon slackened although they did not entirely cease. The case was on the road to being filed among the unsolved mysteries in the police records, but Jimmy Smith's interest did not wane. Superstitiously, since he could not otherwise account for the peculiar effect the crime had had upon him, he believed that Judith's murder concerned him closely, that it was imperative that he should run the criminal to earth lest evil should befall some one who was dearer to him than his life. For this he could not account at all, since there was, he thought, only one person now who was unspeakably dear to him, and he did not know where she was or what she was about. He could not explain the obsession at all and it was completely alien to his usual phlegmatic unconcern with other people's affairs. But in spite of his efforts to forget, the obsession persisted; somewhere in that temporarily blocked cell of his memory lay the clue to the solution of the mystery.

Over and over again he read the report of the inquest. There were several things there, he considered, that were not satisfactorily explained, and after her release he had had rather an illuminating conversation with Agnes, although the interview only lasted a minute and took place in full view of the public when she returned to the inn to pack her things. He had sent her a message asking for a few words in private, but, whether by accident or

intentionally he could not be sure, his request had been ignored. Mr. Smith had met her, quite by accident, on the staircase and, because he was genuinely sorry for the girl and sympathised with her in the terrible ordeal she had been through, had smiled at her. Joe Levy waited for her at the foot of the stairs and Mrs. Huxham stood at the top. It would be quite useless to attempt to question her now, Jimmy decided, but he smiled at her kindly. "Best of luck to you, Agnes," he said, and added, "Here's something to buy a wedding present with."

The girl, still obviously overwrought, smiled at him gratefully with dewy eyes. "Oh, thank you, Mr. Smith," she murmured with a catch in her voice. "I didn't do it. Indeed I didn't."

Jimmy gazed at her intently as he said gravely, "I know you didn't, Agnes, but who did?" and saw her smiling look frozen into terrified immobility.

"How should I know?" she asked with a gasp and ran quickly down the stairs to where young Levy waited. The Jew looked at the Englishman darkly, put his arm round the weeping girl and led her away. The "Anglers' Rest" saw her no more and not even Mrs. Huxham attended her wedding although that lady was somewhat offended at not being invited. But the landlady of the "Anglers' Rest" was a kindly and tolerant woman. "Funny of her, I thought, not to ask me to see her married

since this had been her home and we all of us believed in her and told her so; still I suppose she wants to forget it all and anyone who might remind her. Besides, I daresay that young man feels ashamed of himself leading a decent girl like that astray and he'd know we didn't feel kindly disposed towards him. Now the sooner those fools of policemen find the man in the grey suit the better; that poor girl won't be able to be happy until the criminal is found."

When Agnes had gone, Jimmy had talked confidentially with Mrs. Huxham, whose habitual good humour had been a trifle ruffled by the shock and the extra work entailed by attending to hundreds of morbid sightseers who had visited the scene of the crime. That was not the kind of custom she cared for or was used to, she said irritably. She shut her doors thankfully at closing time and sat down in her kitchen for a quiet hour. Husband and children had been sent away to stay with relatives long before, being useless as witnesses and unsuitable occupants for a house with a shadow on it. The capable landlady had borne her troubles alone so far, and her lodgers had not added to her worries by bothering her with questions although few of them had left the Inn. On the evening of Agnes' departure Jimmy, seeing the kitchen door open, drifted in and stood nonchalantly on the step, his shoulders gently shutting the door behind him and pressing against it to keep out other possible intruders.

"A beastly time for you, Mrs. Huxham," he began sympathetically.

"Indeed it is, Mr. Smith," she said with emphasis. "I'm that tired and bothered I don't know how to carry on."

"I'm sure you are. Nothing I can do to help is there?"

"It's kind of you to offer but I don't think there is. Things will settle down presently and I can have the old man and the children back, then I won't feel so lonely. But I've lost two helpful girls."

"What do you think about it all?" Jimmy's question appeared idle curiosity.

"I told all I knew in Court," she answered resentfully.

"You don't think Agnes did it?" he persisted gently.

"Indeed I don't, but there's things I don't understand."

Jimmy waited, filling the bowl of his pipe in leisurely fashion.

"You don't mind, do you?" he asked politely.

"Of course not. Come and sit down, will you, Mr. Smith? I've told the girls to leave me in quiet for a bit, so nobody's likely to come in."

She had forgotten her resentment. Evidently she felt the need for confiding in someone, Jimmy decided. That was what he had been hoping for. He was right.

"Nobody seemed to think it important, Mr. Smith, she said slowly as if she were going

over with herself ground which was already well trodden, "but as I said in Court when I first went into the room, I could swear Judy had a ring on her hand. When the doctor examined her there wasn't one there, not on her finger, I mean, though there was one in a bag under her pillow."

"Was it the same one?"

"No."

"What was it like?"

"I couldn't exactly describe it," she began evasively, "there was so much blood everywhere and poor Judy's hand was covered."

Smith nodded. "She was still alive then," he said, "she might have pulled it off herself."

"It would still be on or near the bed," Mrs. Huxham replied.

"You didn't see it again?" he asked.

"Not then," she answered, and Jimmy was afraid she would say no more.

"But it was so curious that you could not help recognising it when you did see it again," he prompted her, "a rather wide gold band more like a signet-ring than a girl's jewel, with a large red stone, ruby probably, but not cut in the way English stones generally are?"

Mrs. Huxham fell into the trap. "That's it," she said.

"In fact," Jimmy went on slowly as if she had not spoken, "exactly like the ring Agnes had on in Court."

Mrs. Huxham bit her lip. "I didn't say so, Mr. Smith."

"No, but it was hardly likely there would be two rings like that in the house."

Mrs. Huxham gave up the effort to be secretive; for days she had been wanting to talk to someone, to talk naturally, without a guard upon her tongue. She distrusted the attitude of the police and of those who were going to be put into the witness-box, and she had no great belief in the discretion of her own staff. She had taken away from the Court the idea that everyone in it was hostile to Agnes except the Coroner and she realised that she could not give him private information of this kind. She was immensely relieved to be able to speak freely at last to someone.

"I've never known Agnes take a thing," she said thoughtfully. "She had heaps of chances, money and things that might not be missed. She said that was her ring, that her young man had given it to her the night before. How did it get on Judy's finger?"

"Did you ask her?"

"Yes."

"What did she say?"

"Swore that I had been mistaken, that it was on her hand I saw it and that it had never left her finger since Joe put it there the night before."

"You don't know anything more about the two girls before they came to you than you told in court?"

"There's no mystery about Agnes," she replied. "I wish I knew who had started the

rumour that there was; it didn't do her any good. Her parents were decent but poor Irish people—the father had a job on the railway, I think. They lived in Kentish Town in London. Agnes was the only child. Then both the parents died within a few days of each other in one of the terrible times of influenza, and the nuns who belonged, somehow, to the Church they went to—I don't know much about Catholics and their ways—took charge of Agnes, taught her schooling first and then trained her for domestic service. This was her first place."

"And Judy?"

"Came to the same convent Agnes was at from one in France. She couldn't speak English when she came, Agnes said. No one knows anything about her parents. She seemed not to know herself, or else she pretended not to, but she was no talker was Judy. Sometimes you couldn't get a word out of her, though she was always good tempered."

"This French Countess who befriended her?" Jimmy began.

"Judy only said she had been kind to her and was dead."

"Agnes seems to be the only person with a key to this mystery," Jimmy said.

Mrs. Huxham was thinking deeply and nodded once or twice as if she had suddenly made up her mind.

"Do you know French, Mr. Smith?" she asked abruptly.

"Very well indeed," Jimmy answered with some surprise.

"I've a packet of Judith's letters. She gave me a box of her things to look after as she had nothing that would lock up. There's nothing of any value, just a few trinkets, mostly religious, I should think, a silver cross and some medals with saints or something on them and a few letters. They were from her nuns and I knew she wouldn't want them fingered and read in the police court. Besides, I knew there couldn't be anything in them that would help the police so I just kept them. I did look through the English ones to make sure there was nothing the police ought to know, and of course there wasn't. But some of them are in French. Perhaps you might find something about her childhood if you looked at them. I don't suppose there's anything much but I'll get them."

Mrs. Huxham rose rather stiffly from her chair.

"My, I am tired," she said wearily, opening one of the cupboards built into the wall by the fireplace. From an old wooden workbox she took a slim packet of letters tied together with a piece of blue ribbon—a dozen there might have been in all, written in violet ink on thin foreign paper and addressed in a fine pointed Italian handwriting. The stamps were French and the postmark Tours and, in spite of the family resemblance of all continental penmanship, Jimmy judged them all to have been

addressed by the same hand. He glanced at them.

"You are right," he said, "they are from her French convent school, not allowed to be called a convent, nowadays, by the way, since the religious houses were suppressed. Still, it's the same thing under another name, and I don't think we shall find much to help us here. Still I'll look through them. They might at least mention the name of her benefactress." He slipped them into his pocket. "They seem to go back six years at any rate," he added thoughtfully. "I'll let you have them back in a day or two, Mrs. Huxham."

But he did not read them at once. He had had a feeling of discomfort at the inn since the tragedy, an insistent sense of something that he ought to do and which he could not remember. He slept and ate there but most of his waking hours were spent elsewhere. He went for a walk now and later turned in to smoke a last pipe with Dr. Fellows.

"Still intent on solving the mystery?" the old doctor asked.

"Shan't rest till I do," Jimmy said abruptly.

The doctor looked at him quizzically. "I didn't know you were so interested in crime, my boy," he said.

"Interested!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I should think I was. Why, a murder always makes me—— Haven't you ever wondered why my past is buried in obscurity, Doc?"

"I have, of course, but it was none of my business."

"Well, I'll make you an accessory. When I was a boy I committed a murder myself—or thought I did."

"Good Lord," exclaimed Dr. Fellows, shaken out of his usual calm.

"I was a boy of eighteen, just left school, and imagining myself desperately in love with a girl in the village. I was staying with my best pal and he said something so insulting about her that I saw red and hit out at him. He fell and hit his head on a rock and I thought he was dead and did a bunk. A fool and a coward, you see."

"At eighteen," the old doctor murmured understandingly.

"I vanished completely and my family thought I was dead. It seemed better, if there were a warrant out for my arrest. I just had pluck enough not to involve them, scared as I was. I hid some clothes on one bank of the river and went for a swim and left my ordinary things with full identification marks on the other bank. I hoped they would think I was drowned, though I have heard since that they doubted it. And the joke was on me; after a year I discovered that I had not killed my friend but enabled him to marry the lady in the case and when I came back to England more than eight years later I found my supposed victim most exuberantly alive and exceedingly unhappy. I stayed dead though. It

seemed better all around. A coward, you know, to people like mine must seem worse than a murderer who strikes in defense of a lady's reputation even though everyone but he knows that she hasn't one. But I still get attacks of nerves when I feel that I'm being hounded down, and I have a fellow feeling for the average criminal. It wasn't the war that turned me into the wreck I was, the nerve strain had come years before. Well, I've been a soldier since then and committed lots of murders with an official blessing and one . . ." Jimmy's hand was shaking as he relit his pipe. "Are you superstitious, Doc?" he asked after a pause.

The doctor's eyes flickered. "Do you expect a man of science to confess to a weakness of the ignorant?" he asked.

"That means you are," Jimmy retorted. "Many years spent among Orientals has put me in contact with so many strange things I don't mind confessing that I am. I was sent to Shells in the first place for some special reason. I know it as surely as I know I am sitting here. When I saw the specialist, the nerve man, you know, after the war, and he recommended fishing as the best cure for my complaint I supposed he meant real fishing. I looked up all kinds of books on the subject and made a list of suitable places to visit. Shells was not one of them; the fishing at Shells is to my mind much about the same quality as fishing for tiddlers in a village pond and I had never in my life heard of Shells. One day

I was at Waterloo taking a ticket to Windsor to fill in an hour or two looking at the Castle. The man in front of me had a fishing-rod under his arm and he asked for a ticket to Shells. My tongue thereupon played me a queer trick; instead of saying 'Windsor' I said 'Shells.' When I got to Shells I decided at once that it was the right place for a rest cure. But I have never been able to understand why my tongue betrayed my brain like that."

"It is not an uncommon thing," said the old doctor smiling.

"I am absolutely sure that I was *meant* to come here, Doc." Jimmy was growing a little excited again.

The Doctor looked at him with some anxiety. "There's no new development in the Shells mystery, I suppose?" he interposed tactfully.

"Not as far as I know," Jimmy answered, making a visible effort to recover himself. "As far as I can see the mystery resolves itself into 'Who was Judith Davids?' If we knew that we might be able to discover a motive."

"That would not help much unless we could discover how he got into the room."

"It might. The motive might lead to the murderer and the character of the murderer might lead to the method of the crime."

"Well, but you talk as if you had a quite definite theory of some kind."

"I have. Two in fact. One which I believe

in but which sounds quite mad and the other which is so simple that even the police must have thought of it though they don't seem to have sifted it with any seriousness."

"You don't surely think that Agnes's story was true?"

"I think it has a great deal of truth in it."

"Can't see any light myself," Doctor Fellows said rather wistfully.

"Meaning you would like to share mine," Jimmy grinned. "Well, the simpler one first. Doubt has been cast on nearly every statement Agnes made including the one that the door was locked. So it was when the two girls went to bed, so it was when she unlocked it to run out in the morning, but there is nothing as far as I can see to prevent her locking it and unlocking it again between midnight and four."

"You mean she unlocked it to let someone in; someone who was already in the house?"

"I don't mean that I think that she did, but there is no evidence to prove that she did not. Supposing she did. There were fifteen guests, old man Huxham, Mrs. Huxham, and three other servant girls in the house, any one of whom might have walked into the room, any one of whom might, as far as is known, have had a better motive for killing Judith than it has yet been proved that Agnes had."

"But she can have no motive in shielding anyone."

"She can have no motive in shielding anyone

but her lover, and he was not only a complete stranger to the girl Judy and to everyone else in the house but he had a perfect *alibi*."

"Do you think that she doesn't know?"

"I feel sure she doesn't know. Agnes, and I have this on Judith's authority, has recently taken to walking in her sleep. Very recently; probably in fact only since she has been so terribly worried as to whether her young man would let her down."

"She doesn't know herself?"

"No. Judith apparently didn't tell her, didn't tell anyone or worry about it herself. She only said jestingly to me one day when she was setting the breakfast: 'Agnes woke me with such a start in the night by getting up and lighting a candle while she was still asleep.'"

"You don't think there is anything in your theory?"

"No."

"Well, what's the alternative?"

"The mad one? Well, have you ever heard of a 'bolt from the blue' or a little song which goes something like this 'I shot an arrow in the air, It fell to earth I know not where'?"

"An accident?"

"No, a faked *alibi* and an ingenious weapon. But the whole thing still turns on 'Who was Judith Davids?' By the way, I have some letters that I want to glance at, do you mind if I look at them here?"

"Of course not," said the doctor, still looking puzzled. "I'll go and look for drinks."

Jimmy turned over the thin rustling sheets—nothing but words of kindness and advice and exhortations to holiness except an occasional reference, in the early letters, to that dear Madame la Comtesse de Soignie and her benefactions—not one word of a life which began outside the Convent walls. Jimmy Smith was disappointed; he had hoped for some slender thread which might knit the present to the past. He turned the envelopes upside down and shook them. A faded snapshot fell to the table face downward; across the back was written in a child's unformed hand: "Madame la Comtesse de Soignie." Jimmy turned it over and sat staring for a minute incredulously. "My God!" he whispered hoarsely. "It's Jeanne."

Dr. Fellows, returning to the room cheerily with a bottle of whisky and glasses, gazed at his guest with great concern; Jimmy's face was white and beaded with sweat, his hands clasped and unclasped themselves as he strove for self control. The doctor poured him out a stiff whisky-and-soda which the younger man gulped down at a draught. Automatically he felt for his pipe and filled the bowl with shaking fingers, humming unconsciously a little tune to try to stop the trembling of his lips. He paused in the act of striking a match, his face suddenly attentive, and hummed once again a few bars of the tune. Suddenly he sprang to his feet and stared at the doctor with dilated eyes.

"My God!" he said hoarsely. "I've got the clue I was looking for, that I knew was locked up in the back of my mind. That tune—I've heard Judy hum it and there's only one place where she could have learnt it. It's a local song and I last heard of it in its native town fifteen years ago; the ring on her finger; I saw that too fifteen years ago, but only once, and I had forgotten it, the last words Mrs. Huxham heard her say—the words any woman of her race would say as she was dying. By Heaven I'll get that devil yet."

Jimmy Smith was back in the past, a soldier of the Legion shrouded in an Arab burnous, and watching with starting eyeballs the body of a slender girl which bumped against a grating set across the river which runs through the mysterious city of Fez. And behind him as he looked a man in Arab dress was opening a door and nonchalantly humming an unmelodious little tune.

PART II

THE AVENGER

I

It was not until some time later that Jimmy Smith was able to control his agitation sufficiently to tell the old doctor the tale of that earlier crime.

"And you didn't catch Oldberg or the second man?" Dr. Fellows asked when he heard the story.

Jimmy's excitement was dying down; his eyes still glittered, but the hand with which he lifted his glass was steady enough.

"No," he said slowly. "Fritz Oldberg got wind somehow of justice to come and vanished. I have never seen or heard anything of him from that day to this, though I tried hard enough to find him and choke the life out of him. He was the real criminal, although of course what happened was not of his choosing. Indeed, since I suppose he loved Paulette in his way, perhaps his punishment was worse than any I could have meted out to him. As for the second native," he went on after a second's

hesitation. "It's funny how we change. There was nothing on earth then that I wanted to do as much as to strangle the other murderer, but afterwards I forgot it, or nearly forgot it.

"I was a soldier of France first; in the Legion there is little chance and little time for private affairs. I could not stay there in Fez to hunt down that second man. I had to return to the Legion, and almost at once we were sent back to Sidi bel Abbas. There was fighting down in the far south against the desert robbers, the terrible veiled Touaregs, and life was too hard to think. And presently, when my time in the Legion was nearly up, there was war in Europe and I could not leave. And war in Belgium and Flanders did what the Legion had not been able to do; it broke my nerve. Life in the Legion is so hard that fighting comes as a relaxation and fighting the Arabs keeps some of the ancient glamour of warfare; there is room in it for individuality, you fight an enemy who is a human being and, generally, desperately brave. If you bring your enemy down, you know you have hit him, it has none of the soulless business of being slaughtered in heaps by machines handled by enemies whom you never see.

"European war is a beastly inhuman affair; desert war has still some adventure and the *chance* of hand-to-hand conflict where the better man wins. Besides, though excessive heat and thirst are terrible they are less terrible than perpetual rain, mud, cold, and rotting

corpses. So the German did what the Arab and the Legion sergeant-major could not accomplish. When the war was over and I was free to go I was as you first knew me, too tired to care about anything in the world but rest. If it had not been for this murder of Judy I should have let it all go—not forgotten or ceased to hate, but I should have tried to put it behind me in a nightmare past."

"Well, but I still don't see the connection?" the doctor began.

"It is not clear yet," Jimmy acknowledged. "But I know enough to discover the truth and I am afraid, terribly afraid, for the de Belforts."

"But what have they——" the astonished doctor inquired, but was interrupted by Jimmy, who apparently had not heard.

"The words that Judy said when she was dying were not 'I shall Ah' but 'Inshallah' (it is the will of Allah), the phrase any good Moslem might say at the last. And the tune I heard her hum was a local song of Fez which she would be mostly unlikely to have learned elsewhere. Therefore it seems to me that I can take it for granted that she was a Mohammedan girl from a Fez household. Her patroness was the Comtesse de Soignie whom I knew as Jeanne de Belfort; the ring which Mrs. Huxham said Judy had on her finger but which I saw afterwards on the hand of Agnes belonged once to Paulette Duncombe—it was the one which she chose in the shop of Abdul Malek

when I watched her through the curtains at the back of the shop and it was on her finger when she disappeared. Do these facts put together mean nothing?"

"Ah, but how does Agnes come into it, do you suppose?

"Either Agnes stole it from Judy's hand or else it was Agnes's engagement ring, given her by the young Jew she has married. He might have bought it by chance, or he might have stolen it from someone else or it might have been in the possession of his family. I cannot see any way of finding out since Agnes will not speak. Perhaps she does not know. All the time I have thought he was the criminal, now I have a clue which leads directly to him. The first thing is to find a flaw in that *alibi*."

"I should think the best way of unravelling the tangle would be to start at the other end," said the doctor shrewdly. "Someone must be able to tell you how Judy came into the care of Mdlle. de Belfort."

The scowl left Jimmy's brow. "By Jove, that's an idea. Dear lovely Jeanne. Picture to yourself, doctor, that fool of a *légionnaire* nameless, with a crime on his conscience and nothing but his pay of a *sou* a day, who committed the imbecility of falling in love with so beautiful and high-born a lady. For that's what I did, although thank Heaven she never knew my folly. I left blind Omar in Fez to track down that second man—he was to report progress to Abdul Malek's brother who

would send on the news to Dar el Baida whence it could be forwarded to Louis de Belfort or me.

"There was plenty of money sent out by Miss Duncombe's people when they grasped the idea that crime is not punished in a country that does not possess anything that they would call either law or police. I went back to Dar el Baida to the Legion and I told Jeanne some, and Louis all, of the truth, and there was between us as much friendship as was possible between French aristocrats and a nameless *légionnaire*. Jeanne, I think, believed, perhaps that I was a half-brother of Paulette Duncombe's, unacknowledged of course and unknown to her, and she treated me with great kindness. What Louis thought I do not know, but he was more than civil. When I returned to Sidi bel Abbas and presently went South to the Sahara they wrote me kind letters telling me that Omar reported periodically and that still there was no news, and they sent me cigarettes, wonderful English cigarettes, an unheard-of luxury for a *légionnaire,* apart from the fact that it is good to be remembered, and in all the world I had only one other friend outside the Legion. When the Great War began Louis went with his battalion to Alsace and Jeanne became a nurse and then I heard no more of them, nor of Abdul Malek nor of Omar.

"The great catastrophe swallowed up everything else. From the autumn of 1914 until now I knew nothing of our private drama, nor of the people who played in it, though

I heard by chance that Louis had been killed. And now, in this strange way, I have news of Jeanne who married and died without my knowing it, though she was dearer to me than anyone in the world. You are right, Doc, my first job must be to seek the Comte de Siognie or some of the de Belforts and find out what they know."

But first Mr. Smith went to call upon Agnes. "A ceremonial call upon the bride," he explained. Agnes was pleased to see him apparently as an individual but at the same time terribly scared. It was useless for him to pretend, of course, that he had no ulterior motive in his call and he did not attempt to.

"The truth of the matter is, Agnes, that I think I have found a clue and I want you to help me. Can you imagine what made Mrs. Huxham think that she saw a ring on poor Judy's finger when she first went into that room?"

Agnes was trembling and her face was white as chalk but otherwise she displayed a new-found self-control.

"She must have imagined it," she said firmly. "Judy's ring was under her pillow; the doctor found it there. Mrs. Huxham must have got it confused with mine which was on my hand and which she had not seen before."

"Given you by your husband, I suppose?" Jimmy's tone was careless.

"Yes. Only the night before and nobody had seen it."

"May I look?" Jimmy asked coolly, and when the girl held out her hand, added, as he examined it with interest, "Very unusual, isn't it? And rather attractive I think. Not the sort of thing anyone might have."

Agnes had recovered herself. "Yes, isn't it?" she answered eagerly. "Joe, my husband, you know, helps his father in his business—antiques and things, mostly jewellery and curios I think. This came from the stock, Moorish they say it is and ever so old."

"You don't know how they got hold of it, I suppose?"

"I think it came with a lot of other things from Cadiz. Joe has an uncle in Cadiz and another in Constantinople and a cousin in Cairo. They are all partners in the business."

"And another in Fez, I suppose," Jimmy suggested carelessly, but he gave her a searching look.

Agnes, however, was unconcerned. "I don't know where that is, and I haven't heard them talk of it," she answered, and Jimmy was sure she spoke the truth. Joe Levy came in before Jimmy left, a dark young man, obviously Jewish but equally obviously completely Anglicised in all outward aspects. He displayed no discomfort at the sight of his wife's visitor. His father followed him, a benevolent old gentleman with a patriarchal white beard and charming manners, who spoke English too fluently to be a recent arrival in London. Jimmy was faintly disappointed; he had had a

vague hope that they might be so lately of the Orient that he might pick up the threads of the mystery here, but there was no possible excuse for suspecting these courteous, almost cultured, Londoners, who happened to be Jews, of complicity in two hideous crimes, about one of which they were quite willing to talk freely when Agnes was out of the room. Joe Levy moreover had every appearance of being an affectionate husband; there seemed no grounds for supposing that he had married Agnes only to stop her tongue. Jimmy's belief that Joe Levy was the criminal was shaken; but if he were not, whom were they shielding?

Agnes alone saw him to the door; evidently they were not afraid of anything she might tell.

"I shall be glad when the baby arrives," she said shyly. "After that I shall perhaps be able to go down and see Mrs. Huxham again."

The mention of Agnes's baby reminded him of another baby who might be implicated in this affair. What had happened to Lucie de Belfort? She must be a young woman by now; married perhaps? but if danger threatened the de Belfort family she too might be a victim. He quickened his steps. Some of the tenderness which he had felt for the baby Lucie welled up in his heart again. He must act quickly before ill befell her.

II

The village of Soignie lay in a fold of the Jura Mountains and the Chateau of the Comtes de Soignie perched on a ledge overlooking the village. It was an unpretentious house but well cared for; its owner evidently had not been overwhelmed by the post-war financial disasters of France. Jimmy Smith, standing under the porch with his back to the house, looked at the surroundings with an appreciative eye. Less majestic, perhaps, than the Alps, but still very impressive, were those peaks of the Jura which rose in a semicircle like sentinels on three sides of the house. On the fourth side the land sloped away gradually, spreading in wide, gently undulating green slopes until they dipped into Lac Léman and rising again to the snowclad caps of the Alps dominated by Mont Blanc. Jimmy had morose moods in which mountains appealed to him enormously, and this bright September day had hitherto been spoilt by one of these moods in which all other desires were dead in him save that of cutting himself off entirely from his kind and living as a hermit in some remote cave of the Himalayas. But already these mountains had soothed him; their calm grandeur reproached his irritability.

"Where's your sense of proportion?" they seemed to say. He had come that morning from Bellegarde on the frontier by a little local railway which clung to the sides of the

mountains by its eyebrows, as it were, clinging to earth which slid away into precipices on the outer side, while isolated farms and tiny villages peered over its head on the inner slope. The Chateau de Soignie was the only house of outstanding importance between Bellegarde and Divonne, and Jimmy commended the taste of its owners who had selected such a delectable spot in which to make a home. He pulled the iron ring outside the front door again and heard the clang of the old-fashioned bell at the back of the house. The Count was in residence, he had been told, but evidently kept little state.

An ancient manservant in a green baize apron answered the door at last and showed the visitor at first into the great *salon* which struck a chill into his bones in spite of the warm sunshine outside. Jimmy was not kept waiting there for long, however. In a few moments he was following the old man through the house to a terrace where he found the master of the house. Monsieur de Soignie received him courteously, even, it seemed to Jimmy, eagerly. In this out-of-the-way spot, beautiful as it was, and cut off from everything that might be expected to make life bearable for a man in early middle life, it was hardly to be wondered at if he were unusually pleased to see an intelligent stranger; for the Comte de Soignie was, and had been for years, a prisoner in a wheel chair. He had fought on the Marne and he had no feet and he was not yet forty.

One leg was amputated at the ankle and one at the knee and on one hand, the right, he had only three fingers. And, as if Fortune had not sufficiently buffeted him, he had lost his adored wife and newly-born son less than a year ago. Jimmy, at this first glance at Jeanne's husband, understood at once why she had married him and how her pride must have responded to his. It is not the custom in France to marry for love, but there had been love here. Jeanne and her husband, like Jimmy himself, had been ill-starred. Poor lovely Jeanne! to have had so shadowed a happiness and to have been taken away from it so soon.

Jimmy found it a little difficult to state his errand; he wanted to explain as little as possible and yet to be frank. If only he could guess how much Jeanne had told her husband. He apologised for his intrusion but added: "Long ago, monsieur, I had the honour of meeting your wife and your brother-in-law, Louis de Belfort, in Dar el Baida. They were kind enough to call themselves my friends."

The Count's eyes brightened and he looked at the card in his hand.

"Mr. James Smith," he read out slowly. "Is it by any chance Jacques the *légionnaire*?"

So the Count knew at least part of the story. Jimmy felt relieved. "It was," he said with a smile.

"A drastic way of losing oneself, my friend," the Count said drily.

"And as it turned out quite unnecessary," Jimmy retorted.

"Ah. One does foolish things when one is young," the Count sighed. "My wife told me of you, Mr. Smith, and of the great service you rendered, and what she did not know I learned from Louis. If there is anything I can do I shall be most happy to serve you. You will stay to lunch?" It was a statement rather then a question but Jimmy was glad to accept. This was a man after his own heart and he seemed so pathetically pleased to see a visitor.

"It should be ready soon. Afterwards we can talk. I am much alone and your company will give me such great pleasure."

The same old manservant, now dressed in a shabby livery, waited at table and afterwards set coffee on the terrasse whence the view dipped down to Lac Léman and rose again to Mont Blanc. He wheeled the Count's chair to a sunny corner and left the two men to their talk. Jimmy, finding no need for concealment, told his story frankly and then elaborated his theory which would have sounded so fantastic to the ears of the London police.

"What I came to ask you," he ended, "was for information about this girl Judy. How did she come into Madame de Soignie's care?"

"There is a gap of ten years in your knowledge, my friend. I can fill in a little for you," de Soignie remarked. "The last you heard in

1914 you say was that Jeanne was in hospital nursing the wounded, Louis in Alsace fighting Germans, and the man Omar in Fez watching, watching, tireless, living only for revenge. Dressed as a beggar, as indeed he was, he sat day after day outside the Kairouan Mosque. Your friend, Abdul Malek, urged him to seek in other cities; the death of his companion must have scared him, Abdul Malek argued; he would flee from Fez and hide in some other city, in Meknas most likely since as yet the Christian had not been allowed to enter its sacred walls. But Omar was obdurate. 'A Fasi,' he said would return to his own city eventually, and if in Fez would assuredly pass into the Kairouan. (It is like your Charing Cross Railway station, I think, the Count suggested, anyone coming home will pass through there in time.) Louis, as it happened, went back to Dar el Baida for a few months in 1916. Omar was still waiting and Abdul Malek still acted as intermediary, supplying Omar with funds. But Maroc was changing; the French controlled it now, and in the great cities, at least, if dead bodies were found in the river strict enquiries were made. The de Belforts were old friends of mine. I had lost my legs by that time and Jeanne said it would please her to look after me. I was selfish enough to accept such a sacrifice, but what would you, monsieur? when you see Heaven opening for you it is difficult not to step in. I had also, it appeared, rendered the de Belforts a service. I had with my own hand

just before I was wounded killed a German whose name was Fritz Oldberg."

"Ah," Jimmy exclaimed, and there was satisfaction in his tone.

The Count nodded. "You, too, are pleased. I know, because I took the papers from his pockets. No need to let the ghouls of the battlefield rob the dead I thought. I did not look at the papers then. Later, when I was able to, I sent them to his people. But Jeanne, who was so gentle, was glad that it was my hand which avenged a wrong. Jeanne and I, after we were married, came to live here. That was in 1916, and Louis was in Dar el Baida. One day there came a letter: Omar at last had tracked his enemy. He had, as Omar had predicted, returned to his home at last, openly. Doubtless he had returned before in secret. As a good Mussulman he had gone to say his prayers in the great Mosque. He was no singer, that one, but Omar knew his step, even among the shuffle of hundreds of *babuches*, and he knew his voice also when presently he came out of the Mosque and threw the blind beggar a handful of *floos*. A man with his eyes might have forgotten in five years but not a blind man obsessed with one idea.

"So Omar tracked him to his house and watched, waiting an opportunity to strike. But Fez, as I say, was no longer a place of lawless savagery—superficially at least. The French who were invaders in 1912 were virtual owners in 1916, and law and order reigned in the city.

No longer could enemies be stabbed in the dark and bodies bump against the gratings of the Oued Fez and no questions be asked. Omar realised that an act of just revenge would now be called a murder and punished by the French. Strangling or a knife in the dark were not advisable. He weighed the merits of a carefully staged accident, difficult for a blind man to arrange, or a little poison, and for that a trustworthy confederate within the house would be necessary. He confided his perplexity to Abdul Malek's brother and that wise old gentleman, entering into the spirit of the thing, gave him advice and held his tongue until afterwards saying no word even to his brother. He knew that the Nazrani who would kill in passion and consider it bravery would disapprove of poison administered in cold blood. A good Christian might strangle an enemy if he caught him in the act of crime but he would shrink with horror from planning his death with care. A strange thing, isn't it?"

Jimmy nodded. He himself could kill a man in righteous anger, and in the heat of battle, but he could not plot to poison him in cold blood.

"Omar was not, of course, troubled with silly scruples of that kind. An enemy is an enemy, and an eye for an eye, plus interest, is the golden rule. So the blind beggar set about making a friend in his enemy's house. That is one of the things in these Oriental beggars which fills me with amazement—their endless

patience. When they have really made up their minds to a thing time doesn't seem to matter. I suppose you've noticed that."

Jimmy acquiesced a little impatiently. At any other time he would have enjoyed a discussion on the peculiar twistings in the Oriental character with the Comte de Soignie who so flatteringly appreciated his unexpected company; at the moment, however, all he wanted was the end of the tale.

"The man's name was Bou Smain and he was a leather merchant," went on the Count. "But he had, besides, some mysterious political activities which had brought him into contact with the German agents and which accounted for his part in the crime. Although, even there, it seems to me there is something which can never be explained; their natural course would have been to hold Miss Duncombe to ransom not to murder her. I think, somehow, that from those men's point of view, as from Fritz Oldberg's, the murder was a mistake never intended and probably the work of some jealous native woman. Of his complicity, however, there was no doubt as Omar learned from his slaves. The reason why he played Fritz Oldberg false in the first place is another thing we shall never learn, for he knew of the bargain and the two original guards were his kinsmen.

"Much as I hate my hereditary enemies, the Bosches, I must absolve this particular German from taking an intentional part in the crime; he

wanted to possess the girl, not to murder her. Indeed I have good reason for believing that when he learned of her dreadful fate he tried to commit suicide and was only prevented from doing so by the watchfulness of his mother. To return to Omar, however; the slave of Bou Smain's household was quite willing to be friendly with him: 'the leather merchant,' he explained, 'was a cruel master and brutal to his women.' Happily he had another house in Meknas and was seldom in Fez. He was only here now because his latest wife had just borne him a son. He had other sons but they were grown men and had left the house and set up branches of their father's business elsewhere; 'one of them,' the slave said, warming to his gossip, 'had even gone to the country of the Inglesi.' "

Jimmy sat up in his chair suddenly, doubly alert at that item of news. "In London, I suppose?" he asked sharply.

"Ah, my friend, it was only desultory gossip, and in any case the slave knew little except about the things which happened immediately under his nose. Bou Smain's one virtue, it appeared, was an exceptional devotion to his children, exceptional even where paternal devotion is the rule. He cared nothing for the child wife who was always scared, shy as a bird and terribly unhappy, but he was beside himself with joy over the birth of this new son. The mother, Omar learned, was of Jewish extraction, a child of thirteen, used, that is to

say, to considerably more liberty than is seemly for a Moslem, and she fretted terribly at the confinement in the *harem*. Omar, I fear, was not a good Moslem himself and he led the slave astray by treating him to that which is not lawful for the Faithful to drink and as a consequence his tongue was completely loosened and his sense of discretion sailed down the wind. As he talked, a scheme of vengeance more subtle than murder grew slowly in Omar's mind."

De Soignie was enjoying himself; resignedly Jimmy decided that it was useless to try to hurry him, he must tell the story in his own way. And perhaps in the end it might turn out that every apparently irrelevant detail counted; that "son in England," for instance, impossible at the moment to estimate its importance. Jimmy's attention wandered for a moment. How lovely and peaceful these snow-capped mountains seemed; how far from the sordid labyrinth of Fez. A familiar name roused him.

"Omar went in search of an old friend of his named Massoada," the Count was saying.

"A friend of mine too," Jimmy murmured. "A fat, good-natured old woman with a fund of Rabelaisian talk and a passion for intrigue."

"Well, Omar gave her good measure of her favourite entertainment," the Count remarked with a laugh. "The task Omar set her was almost more than her courage was equal to,

however. He calmly invited her to coax the child wife of Bou Smain to run away and take her baby with her. Both the old woman and the young one should have all the protection and money that they wanted, Omar promised them, once he had got them safely out of the city of Fez. Oh! a much better vengeance than murder this was, to shame Bou Smain and strike him in the one spot where he was vulnerable by robbing him of his baby son. Besides it did not preclude murder later, when a little poison judiciously administered might make an end of the matter; but first let him suffer shame and grief. Massoada needed the deuce of a lot of persuasion and an exceedingly heavy bribe, but she consented at last. What means she used of course we do not know, but she succeeded at length in her mission. Bou Smain had no friends in his own household, and when he was safely out of the way once more in Meknas the nest which held his wife and son was robbed."

"Judith!" Jimmy Smith almost shouted, springing out of his chair in his excitement.

The Count nodded, well pleased at the effect of his dramatic narrative.

"Judith as you say," he laughed. "Omar was wasted. He should have been a member of our secret service. The story of the manner in which he contrived to smuggle the girl and her baby and the fat Massoada out of Fez and into Dar el Baida is an Odyssey. Once in Dar el Baida it was easier. Hadj Abdul Malek,

your friend, and a very faithful one although his friendship has not been without profit to himself, sheltered the fugitives until he could communicate with you or Louis. Louis, as it happened, was on the spot. He arranged with the wife of one of his army friends to bring the girl to France and hand her over to Jeanne. A risky proceeding, of course, but the girl was exceptionally clever and quick in understanding and, in a way, it was simplified because the baby died. He would have died in any case, but the girl was frantic with grief at her loss and more than ever did she want to get out of the country. She knew what her fate would be if Bou Smain caught her. The Spanish Inquisition could have learned a lot from a Moor's treatment of runaway wives. Massoada decided that it was very comfortable in the house of Abdul Malek and elected to remain there.

"In time the pathetic little Judith was safely delivered into Jeanne's care. We kept her here long enough to teach her the elements of Western behaviour; warned her never to talk about her past and then sent her to a convent school for comfort and education. Jeanne saw her sometimes but thought it better not to have her here in case Bou Smain traced her, and later decided that she would be even safer in England. She had an idea, but there was never any truth in it that I could discover, that Bou Smain had traced her to Dar el Baida and that it was only a question of

time before he linked her up with Louis. But Louis was killed soon afterwards and Omar, unfortunately, died from hurts received in a street accident before he had time to poison his enemy."

"Then Bou Smain is still at large?"

"It would appear so."

"You mean he was responsible for Judith's death?"

"Who else?"

"You are right of course," Jimmy conceded thoughtfully. "Now where the devil is he and how is he disguised and how does Agnes come into this story? If that husband of hers, as I had expected, had shown any signs of recent connection with the Orient. . . . He must be tracked down, of course. A man like that would seek vengeance on those who wronged him; all the de Belforts, you, me, Abdul Malek, are running great risks as long as he is at large. If only I knew where to look for him. Fez and Meknas, I suppose, are the very last places."

"I'm afraid I cannot help you there," the Count replied regretfully. "But my sister-in-law, Lucie de Belfort, might be able to. She has actually seen the man and could perhaps describe him well enough for you to recognise him."

"Lucie de Belfort," Jimmy repeated stupidly.

"Yes, I thought you knew her?" de Soignie said with some surprise. Jeanne's younger sister. Mdlle. Lucie is only twenty-one now but the 'jeune fille' is no longer what she was,

even in France. Lucie has interested herself in the League of Nations and is tremendously busy, whether usefully or not I cannot say, down there in Geneva." The Count waved his hand towards Lac Léman. "I will give you a letter and you can go and see her. Perhaps she will remind you of Jeanne," he added wistfully. "There is so extraordinary a likeness that sometimes I am glad to see her and sometimes it gives me intolerable pain."

Jimmy murmured some conventional words of sympathy. He found himself all eagerness to see the girl who was so like Jeanne.

"Does she live in Geneva?" he asked presently.

"Lucie? Most of the time. She has a home when she needs it with an aunt in Paris. While Jeanne lived she had a home here. But Lucie is the last of the family. She should make a 'convenable' marriage. But it is difficult to arrange when she is so wilful and so reluctant and the husband selected for her by the family was killed in the war. Her *dot* too is hardly adequate to secure a good *parti*. Besides, if I know anything of Lucie, she will insist on choosing for herself. These English customs are undermining the family life of France."

III

As he journeyed next day towards Geneva by the tramway from Gex Jimmy found himself

feeling glad that Lucie de Belfort was reluctant to embark upon an "arranged" marriage, and then called himself a fool. How could Lucie de Belfort's plans concern him? She must have forgotten him long ago and he was little more eligible now to be her friend than, years ago, he had been to be Jeanne's. True, he was his own man now and earning a decent income, but he was still without a name and with a cloud over him. To that enchanting baby a *légionnaire* was a hero but to a highly-placed young woman he would be a contemptible figure.

Geneva was sweltering in a heat wave when he reached it; after the freshness of the mountains the air of the town seemed oppressive and soiled. Jimmy booked a room at the Continental, deposited his suitcase, ate a solitary dinner and then set out to look for the house in the Rue de Saléve in which de Soignie had said that his sister-in-law had an "appartement." Jimmy had paid small attention to the League of Nations and its affairs. He was a soldier by training and inheritance and regarded it as an expensive hobby of cranks; "as long as there were men there would be wars," thought James Smith. Still war was hard on women and if the child Lucie (he was quite unable to visualise her as a woman) wanted to work for an impracticable ideal it was a charming trait, even if ineffective.) Neither had he ever been in Geneva before, and after a cursory glance he decided that it did not please him, too prim

and conventional to a lover of the past. He crossed the Bridge and paused a moment to look down at the water and the swans preening themselves; with the coming of darkness the town seemed to him to take on a new aspect, a greater friendliness.

One by one golden globes of light sprang into being all round him; bicycles gaily lit by Chinese paper lanterns swept past him, changing the austere conventional atmosphere of the Calvinistic town into a fantastic shadow of Carnival. He crossed the bridge and climbed the steep and narrow streets of the Old Town, past the ugly Cathedral and the Russian church with its bizarre globe of gilt. Lucie de Belfort evidently cared more for "atmosphere" than for convenience, since living on this side of the Lake must mean a long journey to and from that palatial building which housed the Secretariat of the League.

There were no large shops, cinemas or gaily lighted cafés here, only tall, cold and rather repellent-looking houses with rusty railings and peeling paint. He stopped before one of them, a little sprucer than the rest, mounted the steps and pushed open the door, finding himself in a bare lobby with an uncarpeted stone staircase facing him. Lucie's rooms, as he saw from the card in the lobby, were on the top floor, and he mounted the stairs without ringing the bell which he saw below the card which bore her name. His customary dreaminess had left him; never in his life had he

felt more vividly alive and observant. The occasion, somehow, seemed to him more important than a formal call upon a girl, practically unknown, who could give him information which he wanted. He reached the top landing and, looking through the window which faced him, understood why Lucie preferred to live up here even at the expense of additional fatigue.

All Lac Léman lay spread before his eyes and the dark line of the Jura rose beyond the opposite shore on which a thousand lights twinkled—a glorious view and well worth the walk and the stiff climb from the tramlines. He pressed the bell beside the shabby door on which a visiting-card was pinned insecurely:

"MDLLE. DE BELFORT
MISS LOIS GREY,"

he read and hoped fervently that Miss Grey was not at home. Almost before the bell had finished ringing the door opened and before his startled eyes there stood a ghost. "Surely Jeanne's sister could not be so exactly like her as that" he thought. The slim figure stood waiting for him to speak and as no words came the finely pencilled eyebrows arched themselves in a look of faint surprise. Jimmy took a letter from his pocket and handed it to her.

"Your brother-in-law, Comte de Soignie, suggested that perhaps you would be kind

enough to give me some information which I am seeking," he said hoarsely. A faint smile spread over the girl's face.

"Won't you come in while I read it?" she asked.

Jimmy was glad to find that the big sitting-room was empty; evidently his hope that Miss Grey would be absent was to be fulfilled. In the clearer light of the room he saw that Lucie was not so absolutely the counterpart of her sister as he had at first supposed. Her dark hair was shingled instead of twisted in a knot on her well-shaped head; her face was a little paler and thinner than Jeanne's had been as he remembered it, and the short skirt of the moment made Lucie appear slighter and smaller than she had seemed at first glance She was standing under a lamp with a shade of golden silk which looked like sunshine, her head bent over the sheets of de Soignie's letter. Looking up suddenly she caught Jimmy's intent look and threw him a smile of warm friendliness.

"Any friend of my sister's, Mr. Smith, is exceedingly welcome. Won't you sit down?"

She indicated a lounge chair drawn up by the window which commanded the same wide, lovely view as the one on the landing, and sat down herself on the window-seat, swinging her silk-clad legs to and fro.

Jimmy was at a loss as to the manner of beginning his explanation; his heart was pounding in his breast and his breath seemed to

come with difficulty. He was so profoundly moved by the sight of this girl that he felt he could not speak to her as to a stranger. Perhaps she guessed his emotion; perhaps she even shared it. Impulsively she stretched out a hand and her dark eyes were misty.

"I know you, Jacques." Her voice was not quite steady. "All my life you have been a friend of mine, though I see you now for the first time after fifteen years. How can I serve you?"

His brown hand closed over the little white one and he did not immediately release it.

"You find me so like Jeanne?" There was laughter instead of mistiness now in the dark eyes which looked at him with a faint air of impudence. Jimmy flushed and released her slim fingers but she moved her hand reluctantly. Impossible that this child should have guessed his so carefully-guarded secret, Jimmy thought, but her next words proved that she had.

"It was impossible, I think, to know Jeanne without loving her. She never forgot you, Jacques."

"I would gladly have died for her, Ma'moiselle," Jimmy said seriously. "The small service I was able to render was in settlement of my own quarrel as well."

"Ah yes, I know. It was fitting perhaps that you rather than Louis should have been the avenger of Paulette, Mr. Duncombe."

Jimmy started. This uncanny child seemed

to know everything. He would have denied it but she put out her hand protestingly.

"Please don't think me impertinent. I will keep your secret which no one else seems to have guessed. Ever since I was six years old, Jacques, I have had a friend whom I have never forgotten. Louis told me of him, Jeanne told me of him, Abdul Malek told me of him. To them he was just a brave *légionnaire* with a history which he wanted to be forgotten, but to me he was a hero of romance. I have listened always, and thought a lot, and made a story which is perhaps the truth?"

"You have made a hero of a coward, Lucie," Jimmy said in a low voice. "A coward who was only by accident not a murderer and who ran away instead of bravely staying to face things out."

"He was but a boy," she whispered, and her voice held the same note of affectionate understanding that Dr. Fellows' had done when he confessed to him. That icy band about his heart of loneliness and fear, that sense of being unsupported, his back against the wall, with a pack of snarling sharp-fanged wolves waiting to tear him to pieces, fell away from Jimmy Smith the outlaw. He had less than a normal share of vanity but he could not mistake the gift which was being offered to him now after all these bitter years. He gazed at the girl before him with grave consideration, seeking for words in which he must refuse to take the priceless gift, but the look of hunger and pain

in his eyes made her cry out as the blood rose hotly to her face.

"To you I am a stranger, Monsieur Jacques," she said with an appealing little gesture. "But you can never be a stranger to me. Always I have remembered. Look."

She opened a drawer and set on the table in a row six painted wooden *légionnaires* and a corporal. Jimmy looked at them in a silence which he dared not break. Did she also remember the occasion on which he had presented them to her? She did, evidently, for she went on: "They were a gift on a special occasion, Jacques. You must think me bold to remind you, if you had forgotten, but I hope you will understand. You loved Jeanne and I am so like her. You will be friends with me?"

"I have not forgotten, Lucie," he said huskily. "It was a betrothal present fifteen years ago."

The intervening years fell away from Jimmy; that love for Jeanne, who was so far above him, which had not died, blossomed anew, as he looked at this little sister of hers, who might have been herself returned to life. And the baby Lucie herself had been so dear to him. Even the faint feeling of shock which he had felt at first vanished. Jeanne had known her own mind equally clearly and had been no less independent. Why, if Jeanne had not set out on that mad journey to Fez he would never have known her. Paulette would not have gone to meet her. . . . Ah! better not think of that,

it would indeed be too cruel to blame Jeanne for his sister's (for Lucie had guessed the truth) dreadful death. He had risen from his chair and was standing in front of Lucie, both her hands held tightly in his while she stood waiting, her eyes demurely cast down.

"You are such a child," Jimmy murmured. "I am thirty-five and a coarse, rough brute, without a name or position or even much money."

"As if that mattered when one loves," Lucie murmured tremulously.

Jimmy turned her face up to his. "My child, you do not realise what you are saying," he said with attempted sternness.

A dimple flickered into sight at the corner of her mouth, and she gave him an amused slanting glance. "You mean you want to break off that fifteen-year-old betrothal?" she asked.

"God forbid," Jimmy cried emphatically.

"Well," she murmured, her face held up provocatively.

Jimmy made a last despairing effort to recapture his vanished common sense. "When I have found Bou Smain," he began, but Lucie's dark eyes looked up reproachfully.

"Bou Smain can wait until to-morrow," she protested. "I have waited so long."

Jimmy was but human; it was useless to play the monk when an earthly heaven was being opened before his eyes. He drew the girl into the circle of his arms.

Lucie, her voice muffled by the thickness of his coat in which her face was buried, laughed rather shakily.

"To-morrow I shall write to my brother-in-law who sent you and tell him how he sent a wolf among the lambs, and how bold is the post-war girl, and myself in particular. I have insisted that a reluctant *fiancé* fulfil his promises. A strange man comes to call on me on business and behold within one little hour I have proposed to marry him and am shamelessly kissing him. *Hélas,* where is that *demoiselle convenable* who used to be the boast of France?"

But Jimmy, half-dazed as he was with his new found happiness after all the dreary years, had not forgotten his errand. He longed to snatch at joy lest it should vanish, but he knew that his mission must come first. The reproachful ghosts of Paulette, Jeanne, Judith, would haunt him if he neglected his self-appointed task. It would be quite useless for him to try to drug himself with sophistry: "Vengeance is mine: I will repay" said the Lord. That would indeed be a coward's shelter. He had an unshakable conviction that it was his job and none other's to track down and bring to justice the criminal who was still at large. Two helpless, unoffending women had been most cruelly done to death; this one whom he held in his arms would be in constant danger while the blood feud continued. It was neither just nor safe that the murderer should go unscathed. For it was a blood feud by now;

Bou Smain was doubtless absolutely convinced that his baby son had been murdered by his enemies; never would he believe that the poor infant died a natural death.

"Lucie, my dearest," Jimmy said presently, putting her from him. "Love and peace must wait until I have found Bou Smain. You would not, in the end, be satisfied if I failed in my trust."

But Lucie was acquiescent now. She would not have been so bold had she not been so terribly afraid of losing him. Had it been love at first sight or was he indeed the embodiment of a lifelong dream? If he were to prove himself the hero of her childhood he must, of course, carry through to the end the task he had begun; besides, no happiness could be durable if the blood of his sister cried aloud for vengeance as he seemed to believe. Louis, her own brother, as she knew very well, would not have rested had she been the victim of the crime. She sighed, but resignedly. Since she must she would lend her lover for a space to pursue his quest. It was a lawful one now, and he need only be the tracker, not the avenger; the French Governor would enforce the law. She returned to her cushion on the window-seat.

"What was it you wanted to know?" she asked in a flat voice.

Jimmy looked at her appealingly. "Don't make it harder than you can help, my dearest," he begged. "The Count said that you had actually seen Bou Smain and could describe

him to me; perhaps even make a sketch of him."

Lucie, ashamed of her momentary sulkiness, was eager to atone.

"Why, of course," she said briskly. "I'll make you a sketch." She fetched pencil and sketch-book and moved a table under the light.

"All Moors look so much alike in their outdoor clothes with their hoods up," she commented as she drew. "There was nothing very remarkable about this man except a long scar from the outer corner of his left eyebrow almost to the corner of his mouth. Omar, I believe, made the cut with a knife before they succeeded in binding him. Bou Smain is oldish and rather fat with very black eyes which seem to see everything. Oh, it will be very difficult to trace him without his knowledge. He has a leather shop in Meknas, that was how I came to see him just after the French had decided that Meknas could no longer be a closed town. I asked your friend, Hadj Abdul Malek, about him, and then I went to Meknas to his shop to buy something, but of course I did not tell him my name and I had on one of those funny little veils so that he could not see my face clearly. Both Jeanne and Louis had warned me, and I thought it just possible that he might have seen and remembered Jeanne. But he is not often in Meknas now I believe. It is not very healthy for him there and he prefers to hide among the dissident tribes. You see there was treachery to France as well,

although they have not yet been able to get sufficient evidence to imprison him. He has given much money in alms and has made the pilgrimage to Mecca twice and he spends time in Damascus and also in Cadiz. Judith had told me things about him when she first came to France that made me want to stick a knife into him on my own account. Afterwards she would not talk about him at all or about anything which had to do with the past."

"Did you learn anything about Judith herself, apart from Bou Smain?"

"Not much, but she did tell me that although her father was a Moor, her mother was a Jewess of Meknas and after she, the mother, was widowed she went back to the Mellah with her little daughter. She must have been terribly poor and I'm afraid she sold poor Judith to Bou Smain in payment of a debt when the poor child was only about eleven."

"You don't happen to know the mother's name, I suppose?"

"I'm not sure, but I think it was Mariam and her husband's name was Daoud ibn Yakub. I don't quite know why I was so curious; I mean what use I thought the information would be to me. As far as I knew the whole dreadful story was of the past. Perhaps it was just inquisitiveness, or perhaps Fate had ordained that I should. I remember questioning Judith about Bou Smain's other wives."

"Ah," Jimmy said with interest.

"She did not tell me much," Lucie went on.

"He had had two others; one a handsome Moorish girl, his official wife I suppose, who was childless, and the other a Jewess, like Judy, who had borne him two sons and had died."

"And the sons?"

"They must have been older than Judy, but they had left their father's house before she entered it and she had never seen them."

"You don't happen to know their names."

"I'm afraid I didn't ask. You see, although I was curious, I did not realise that everything I could find out about the family was important."

"My dear, you have helped me wonderfully. I think I should know Bou Smain anywhere from your sketch and I may be able to learn something in the Mellah. I will start to-morrow and catch a boat from Bordeaux."

"Oh Jacques, you will not go so soon," Lucie cried.

Jimmy drew her into his arms and looked down into the glowing face. "It tears my heart, Lucie; but the sooner I go, dear heart, the sooner I shall return; never can I rest until this thing is ended. 'Old sins have long shadows,'" he went on musingly. "And this shadow of Bou Smain may yet engulf you if I am not quick. It is all my fault, you see. Long ago my sin—or perhaps to the charitable it was only a folly—started this tragedy. If I had not brought disgrace on my family, Paulette would have lived happily at home. She would not have renewed her

friendship with your sister Jeanne; she would not have met Louis and most certainly she would not have gone to Africa. Long shadows, Lucie, for a boy's folly."

"Even so it has brought happiness to me," Lucie whispered.

IV

Jimmy Smith landed at Dar el Baida on a sunny day towards the end of September, but it was a very different Dar el Baida from the one he remembered. Fifteen years before it had been a huddle of native houses bordering narrow cobbled alleyways with a ribbon of sky high above, and surrounded by a crumbling wall, shell-riddled from an earlier bombardment; there had been no lights, no motor-cars, no spacious boulevards. He returned to find a prosperous seaport, the little sister of Marseilles. But if the town had been altered almost out of recognition, Hadj Abdul Malek seemed to have changed hardly at all; a little more wrinkled and withered perhaps, his beard a little whiter and his dark eyes a trifle less alert. His greeting of Jacques, the ex-*légionnaire,* was no less warm than it had been in former years; genuine gratitude had not been lessened by material benefits due to Jacques and the de Belforts and the French residents who followed in their wake, as the port grew in importance. The Hadj, had he been liable for

income tax, might have found himself classed among the millionaires.

"My little son, Sidi," he greeted Jacques, "whom you saved from the hoofs of the mad stallion is a man now and by the blessing of Allah has two sons of his own."

"I am glad, Hadj Abdul Malek," Jacques replied. "May their seed be as the sands of the sea. I have come for news of another man's son."

"Bou Smain's," the old man responded, nodding his head. "How the evil-doer, may he be accursed, found the girl whom Omar stole from him Allah alone knows. I do not know the son; he lives in England and comes to El Maghreb seldom, if at all. I have not seen him. I do not know his name."

"His mother was a Jewess of Meknas," Jimmy explained.

"So it is said. In the *mellah* at Meknas you might learn something of her. Are you sure it was her son?"

"Who murdered the girl?"

The old man nodded.

"Bou Smain is a Moor, Abdul Malek. He speaks no English, he does not know how to wear English clothes, nor to assume the manners of an Englishman. He could not have reached so small a place as Shells without his strangeness being remarked. Someone would have seen him and remembered. Besides he is an old man and fat; the murderer must have been young and agile. This matter is a blood feud.

Would not Bou Smain's eldest son be the right person to avenge the wrong done to his father's house. But how am I to find him in that monstrous London when I do not even know his name. There are thousands of Arabs and of Moorish Jews who have learned the ways of the English. How am I to begin to look?"

"In the *mellah* at Meknas you may learn something," Abdul Malek repeated. "I will give you a letter to a friend."

So Jimmy journeyed to Meknas to find two women, Mariam the mother of Judith and the family of a woman whose name he did not know, but who had been the mother of Bou Smain's eldest and only remaining son.

In outward seeming Meknas had altered little, but the fundamental change was even greater than in the coast towns; it had been a fanatical town, a secret city of Islam where a Christian took his life in his hands if he passed beneath its gate. Now the Christians walked abroad unhindered and car-loads of tourists passed noisily beneath its walls. Muffled in the white woollen *burnous* of the town Moor, Jimmy passed under the high arch, framed with arabesques and painted tiles, which was the gate of the city. All around him were evidences of decay, quagmires, ruins, tall grey mosques and immense minarets overlooking the deserted squares.

On all the grey-white terraces, on all the cracked and tumbling walls, on all the gates and horseshoe arches, grew tall weeds

and bright-hued wild flowers. To reach the Jewish quarter he had to pass through the busier parts of the town, through the street of the silver and jewel merchants, where the desolation and silence gave place to a subdued hum of voices. But even here the atmosphere of decay and sadness persisted and the hooded figures flitted past like ghosts. At the end of this street opened the Gate of the Jews, and as soon as he passed this gate he found himself to all appearances in another country. In place of silence and desolation was bustle and a swarming like a hive of bees; instead of grave-faced brown men, silent and majestic, enveloped in their garments of white wool, there were men with pale skins and long greasy ringlets and black skull caps, closely wrapped in dark and scanty *jellabs,* and unveiled women, unhealthily pale, but often beautiful, clad in bright-hued clothes. The population seemed, as indeed it notoriously was, too dense for the cramped space allotted to it, the despised race, by the arrogant and haughty Moors.

The little streets were encumbered by buyers and sellers, full of noise and harsh voices, carpeted with indescribable filth and fœtid with evil odours that made the visitor choke and his eyes smart. He had been before into the swarming *mellahs* of Arab towns, but never before into one as terrible as this. He found, without difficulty, the home of Ibrahim ben Susan to whom Abdul Malek had given him a letter of introduction and a demand for assist-

ance in the quest. The Jew was a man of substance, he had been given to understand, and associated almost on terms of equality with his masters, the Moors, so that Jimmy looked with some surprise at the shabby front door of his house, very tiny and very low, opening above a stream thick with refuse and difficult for a tall man to enter at all. The Englishman knocked loudly, the door opened and he stepped within, bending almost double to do so, and found himself in the midst of strange, exotic luxury like a scene out of the "Arabian Nights."

He was in an interior "patio" open to the sky and surrounded by a colonnade of slender pillars and graceful arches, and standing on a floor of magnificent mosaics which also decorated the wall to the height of a man and met the fairy-like embroideries of carved and painted stone. In the courtyard were a group of women covered in gold and precious stones, dazzling in the sunrays which fell athwart the tapering arches. The women, for they were dressed as married women although more than half of them were only ten or twelve years old, had petticoats of velvet embroidered with gold, open bodices over silk chemises, both nearly covered with gold. On their arms, in their ears, on their ankles they wore rings of gold studded with precious stones; their raiment seemed to the stranger like that of the "king's daughter whose clothing was of wrought gold." It was a feast day, evidently,

but such splendour within compared with the squalor without seemed incredible.

The master of the house received him cordially and leading the way to an upper story begged him to partake of mint tea. All the women-children in their costumes like idols, followed and sat down on silken cushions piled high on priceless rugs and observed the stranger with a mixture of shyness and boldness which he found embarrassing. "The despised race," Jimmy said to himself sardonically. Neither ruling Moors nor invading Christians could boast of such luxury as this. For the house was as wonderful as the courtyard, and as richly decorated as the women. The only object that was austere and simple in the riot of sumptuousness which surrounded him was the figure of Ibrahim himself.

Presently, when the ceremonial tea-drinking was over, the women withdrew at a sign from the master of the house and Jimmy stated his errand. But Ibrahim, it seemed at first, could give him little help or information.

"Mariam of the household of the Moor, Daoud ibn Yakub, is dead," he stated. "And her daughter vanished. And the other woman who was bought by Bou Smain was not of Meknas but of Fez. She died long ago as you know, and I heard, by the way of gossip, that the house of which she was a daughter moved soon afterwards to Cadiz. I fear I cannot help you, Sidi."

Jimmy's obvious and acute disappointment

must have struck the other with some surprise, but courteously he asked no questions and, giving his visitor time to recover himself, proceeded to tell him some of the gossip of the town.

"Bou Smain the leather merchant, about whose wife you asked, has returned to Meknas after a long absence," he announced. "My brother tells me that he has a visitor, a young man dressed like the Roumi, who speaks English and is believed to be his son. Never before has he been seen in Meknas—and indeed he is seen very little abroad in the town. A little mysterious his business seems to be, and he does not talk at all to his neighbours. Bou Smain is not friendly, but his business prospers and he has money and power."

If Ibrahim noticed the changing expressions of disappointment, of surprise, of triumph, which flitted across his visitors' face as he spoke, he made no comment; it was important for his safety that he should oblige in every way possible anyone who was a friend of Hadj Abdul Malek, and also hold his tongue, so he bade the Englishman farewell courteously and showed him on his way.

Jimmy walked swiftly, a spring in his step. "What luck," he muttered to himself. "What unbelieveable luck that he should happen to be here just when I thought myself beaten."

He sought and found almost immediately Bou Smain's little boxlike shop. It was closed. Ah, well, since he had already waited so long, another day would not matter and he passed

on to the shop of Mansoor, who had a peculiar genius for rolling a certain brand of cigarette. Mansoor, more negro than Moor, sat in his shop, his eyes on his fingers, which, with incredible speed, rolled cigarettes all day. He did not pause to look up at his customer but stretched out his right hand with a bundle and held it ready for the expected coin, his left hand still busy with the cigarette he had been rolling. Jimmy gave him the coin and took a bundle, extracting a cigarette before he put the rest in his belt.

He was fumbling for his matches and turning over in his mind a few polite commonplaces to speak to Mansoor when his attention was caught by the movement of the reed curtain at the back of the shop. He paused in the act of lighting the match as the curtains parted and a turbanned head looked cautiously out. There was no possibility of mistaking it, for Lucie's sketch had been lifelike, and from temple to chin stretched a long deep scar. For an instant they gazed at each other in astonishment, the Moslem and the Christian, the hunter and the quarry, who had not met before and who yet instantly knew each other's business. Bou Smain had had word of Jimmy's coming, as Jimmy had had word of Bou Smain's.

Darkness had fallen and the little swinging lamp in Mansoor's booth gave an insufficient light, but Jimmy knew that he had not made a mistake. The head was withdrawn hastily, and the Englishman, after less than a second's

hesitation and a swift glance up and down the street, sprang into the shop, upsetting the amazed Mansoor and his carefully arranged wares and striking with his head the swinging lamp, so that it smashed against the fretwork screen which divided the shop from the private room behind and instantly went out. Next moment Jimmy was behind the screen stumbling in total darkness and struggling with a cloth which someone, a woman he judged from the tinkle of her bracelets, had thrown over his head. Then at last he was free, half suffocated and choking with the acrid smell of smoke mingled with perfume. Through a small window in the back of the booth he saw the dim outline of Bou Smain's head and shoulders as the old man dropped, with marvelous lightness considering his age and weight into the narrow lane which ran at the back of the shop.

The rising moon showed the running figure of Bou Smain and the following figure of the Englishman who had jumped through the window too swiftly, missed his hold of the frame and fallen face downwards into the mud of the alley. Jimmy was cut about the face and hands and revoltingly dirty, a disreputable figure, grimly determined to run his quarry to earth. He ran easily like a trained athlete, as indeed every man of the Legion must become or die, while Bou Smain was fat and habitually indolent; but the latter had a good start and in the labyrinth of twisting lanes and deep unexpected arches might easily give his pursuer

the slip. Also, Jimmy reflected grimly, his enemy was probably armed, possibly with a pistol, certainly with a knife, whereas he had no weapon. Fortunately, the narrow streets were almost deserted; they passed nobody; no curious glances or peering heads watched the chase; far behind them Jimmy thought he heard the faint sounds of shouting, of pursuing feet.

With a sidewise twist Bou Smain broke from the alley into a passage that was simply a crack between two houses that were built right against the inner wall of the town. Jimmy, running with an easy loping stride, overshot the mark and lost a couple of seconds in turning, so that Bou Smain recovered the distance between them which Jimmy's longer stride had lessened. The house next to the wall had an iron stairway leading to the upper story and the roof. Bou Smain rushed up the stairs and Jimmy heard his breath coming in distressed gasps, reached the roof, crossed it and dropped over into the encircling ditch. Jimmy realised with surprise and relief that the Moor had no intention of taking refuge in his own house or in the house of a friend, where he might have been safe for the moment; he evidently realised that a private enemy in league with his national enemy, the French, would make short shrift. He was making for the open country, trying to shake off the private enemy and go to earth somewhere in a safe spot for which he was making.

Also, evidently, he had a weapon and wanted

to settle this business once for all. Jimmy did not care; he thought it improbable that the weapon was a pistol, otherwise it would have been used before this. His muscular fingers were equal to any other weapon, even to the curved blade of a native knife. Besides, since he had found Lucie, his belief in his luck, which had apparently been dead, blazed up into life once more. It was impossible that Lucie should wait in vain for his return. Jimmy dropped over the parapet a moment after his enemy. It was a twenty-eight-foot drop and by rights they ought both to have been killed, but the native habit of piling heaps of refuse outside the walls saved them; whatever the rubbish was, and from its smell it seemed largely composed of rotting vegetables, it was comparatively soft. The Moor recovered from his shaking before the Englishman, also the latter contrived to entangle his foot in his drapery; when the race began again Bou Smain had more than three minutes start, and three minutes in a life and death struggle like this, with fear lending wings to the pursued, is a terribly long time. Bou Smain's difficult breathing might compel him to give up at any minute but in the meantime he had a long start; he knew the ground over which he was travelling; he knew, obviously, his goal. He had, on the whole, the better of the argument. Between the inner and the outer walls stretched gardens of a poor and neglected kind, ill-fenced and stony.

The Moor turned down an alley between two

of these, breaking the fence but swinging it back into the path behind him so that Jimmy was obliged to stoop and disentangle his robes from the splintered branches which barred his road and tore his clothes. When he was at last past the obstacle Bou Smain had considerably increased his lead. They passed through a gap in the ruined wall and came out on to broken ground, dotted here and there with cactus plants and stunted bushes. Far ahead the Moor had changed his pace; he was no longer running steadily but irregularly; he had evidently got his second wind and had settled down into a jog-trot pace which he might be able to keep up for hours. Jimmy, surprised at his enemy's staying power, made a terrific spurt which lessened the space between them considerably, but he could not keep it up and settled down into the pace of his enemy.

If it were to be a question of who could last longest he had no doubt of the end. It would be wise, he decided, to let his victim tire before they came to closer quarters, to wear him down before he attacked, so that the weapon on which he depended, his fingers, should not be useless with nervous strain. He was still puzzled by the Moor's action in seeking open country, but concluded that he had probably lost his head a little at the beginning and thought it safer to go on rather than to turn back. Jimmy sent a little regretful apology to Lucie. He had promised her, if possible, not to use violence, but to hand the criminal over to auth-

ority. There was enough evidence against him on other counts, spying—for Germany during the war, at least two other murders, gun-running for the Riff—to secure his death sentence officially. But this whim of the Moor's to fight it out in the open country would put an end to that.

Jimmy's promise was not to be binding if he found himself in personal danger. And it was quite possible that Bou Smain was leading him into a trap. Lucie would have to forgive him; he must kill the Moor in self-defence. The country through which they were passing was waste land, rock strewn and desolate, ochre coloured earth, sun-baked and opening in deep cracks, patches of palmetto scrub and cacti, an occasional walled garden with waving trees and the heavenly sound of fountains. The earth looked silvery grey now with a full moon riding high in a sapphire sky.

All of a sudden Bou Smain changed his pace from a jog trot to a quick walk. Jimmy, nothing loath, did the same. He wished he might pause a moment to strike a match and light a cigarette but decided that perhaps it would not be wise. Suddenly he grew impatient. He was growing tired and the old man could not keep this up much longer. Why not finish the business now? close with his prey and chance it? He broke into a run but the Moor's ears were preternaturally sharp. As if he had eyes at the back of his head he knew what his enemy was doing and changed his own

pace. Jimmy, not wanting to come on him winded, cursed and returned to a walk. Instantly Bou Smain did the same. They had run and walked for six hours without a pause. Both men, out of condition through lack of hard exercise, were growing exhausted, but they showed their fatigue in different ways. Jimmy walking lightly and firmly had still the appearance of a man who could cover many miles.

The slackness of civilian life had not yet entirely robbed him of the hardness of the *Légionnaire;* on route marches laden with heavy kit he had often covered forty kilometres, and to-night he had not yet covered two thirds of that distance. His legs might perhaps hold out for another couple of hours, but his head, damaged by the noise of shell fire in the Great War, was failing; every now and then he forgot where he was, the world swung round him for a second, and Bou Smain might never have existed so far as he was concerned. He recovered himself almost at once, but the intervals of half unconsciousness were growing more frequent and lasting longer. He had been tired like this before, in France, and knew what would happen. Presently he would collapse on the ground where he stood and sleep like a log for hours; then the Moor would turn and come back and knife him.

Bou Smain's legs were failing him; he was much heavier than his pursuer and had never been in such magnificent condition, though he was a powerful man. Jimmy had gained

on him a little and could see him swaying and stumbling as he walked. Better finish it at once. For a second Jimmy stopped entirely, stretched his arms and filled his lungs with air, then, for the second time, he began to run. They had entered a dip in the ground, a shallow quarry where stones had been dug for building and the new French roads; in its sides were openings in the rocks which might possibly be deepish caverns. Jimmy suddenly realised that they had reached their destination.

The Moor had prepared his hiding place long ago, probably had a store of food, of guns and ammunition; if he did not strike before his enemy reached the cave it would be too late to strike at all. As Jimmy began to run, Bou Smain also quickened his pace and, turning into one of these narrow openings, gained the cave's mouth and turned on his pursuer, and Jimmy, swerving aside as he ran, saw that the Moor was holding an automatic pistol in his hand. He had been so sure that Bou Smain was unarmed, except with a knife, and to face an enemy at bay, his back to a wall of rock and an automatic pistol in his hand is not a pleasant experience, especially to an exhausted man who is running at a pace he cannot suddenly check. The pistol cracked and the Englishman pitched forward on to his face.

It was dawn when he recovered consciousness and the sun hung like a ball of coloured fire in a still blue sky. Jimmy had flung up his arm to protect his face as he fell; he was lying

now with his head on his arm, which was numb and cold. Cautiously he turned over and lay on his back; his body was stiff and painful from head to foot, but particularly his left shoulder. For a moment he lay at rest, looking up into the blue sky and watching a dark speck which hovered overhead dropping gradually lower and lower. A vulture, obviously; he watched and saw a second and a third hover and drop and appear to inspect him with hungry evil eyes. With an effort he raised himself. Oh, he was a long way from being a dead man yet. He shouted to drive the evil birds away. They rose a little, not far, and hovered, watching, waiting for their prey.

"A damned unpleasant sensation," muttered Jimmy hoarsely. "Those foul birds are cocksure I'm going to provide them with a meal."

He staggered painfully to his feet and moved over to the rock, resting his back against it. His left arm was helpless and the white wool of his Arab robes was stained with clotted blood. Slowly he was remembering. Bou Smain's shot must have hit him in the shoulder and because of his terrible fatigue he had fallen, and once fallen had promptly gone to sleep. Why in Heaven's name had not Bou Smain finished him off? The wound was not serious, though the loss of blood had weakened him. Had the Moor fallen asleep too? He turned and, walking painfully, entered the mouth of the cave.

Bou Smain was lying there in a heap and

Jimmy knew at once that he was dead, had been dead some time; his heart must have given out or a bloodvessel broken in his brain as a result of his exertion and the excitement of having his enemy at his mercy. The pistol had fallen from his hand. Jimmy picked it up; the magazine was empty. Evidently the Moor had no more ammunition or he would have risked a shot before. Jimmy searched him, but found nothing except a little money and a small sharp-bladed knife. Then having pulled the body to the side of the cave where he could later raise a cairn of stones over it to thwart the disgusting birds which waited, he came out again into the sunshine and stood shading his eyes with his hand and looking back along the road they had travelled overnight. In the distance, running, he saw a figure coming towards him at a good pace, and as the runner drew nearer he saw that it was a slender olive skinned youth in Arab dress.

Something about the newcomer was vaguely familiar, but the Englishman could not at the moment remember where he had seen him before. Under his arm he had one of the ancient long barrelled flint-locks frequently seen in the Riff country and among the mountaineers, a clumsy weapon which must have greatly hindered his speed. He had evidently seen and recognised the Englishman from a distance but he did not call out or make any sign, simply checking his pace and coming to a standstill some twenty yards away. Then he raised his

long barrelled gun and deliberately took aim at the man standing in the mouth of the cave. So swift and unexpected was the action that Jimmy stood rooted to the spot in amazement, instinct bidding him duck his head to avoid the shot, although his feet refused to move. But the shot never came. Instead the barrel of the ancient gun jammed and burst, knocking over the man who had fired it and killing him instantly.

Not five minutes before Jimmy had seen him running over the lip of the quarry, a stranger whose business he did not know; now he lay dead, a would-be murderer, so terribly injured that it would be impossible to move him. A fold of his white hood had fallen over his face, the upper part of which had escaped injury. Something jogged Jimmy's memory and he recollected where he had seen that bearded olive-hued face before. The dead man was Agnes O'Reilly's husband.

V

"I decided that Meknas was not a healthy spot for me and cut back to Dar el Baida, and straight on to the next boat bound for Europe." Jimmy finished the tale of his adventures as he sat with Lucie in the high room in Geneva.

"Now I suppose I shall have to go and tell Agnes," he said with some resentment. "There is bad news for her and there are bits of the

puzzle which I still cannot fill in. But I hate hurting women, and there have been too many women hurt already in this business. Of course I always knew, subconsciously, that there was some connection between the Moor's son and Agnes' husband, but the young man seemed so English and so difficult to trip up. Well the feud's ended now, Lucie, unless Agnes has a son who wants to carry it on. I do wish it wasn't necessary for me to go and see her, but I must."

"Shall I come too?" asked Lucie softly. "Will it help?"

"Will you, darling?" her lover said eagerly. "I don't mean come with me to see Agnes but come to England, so that I can be happy just knowing you to be there. And there are friends of mine whom I should like you to know, people who have been kind, knowing nothing about me or thinking me to be under a cloud. Once upon a time I hated all the world and saw every man and woman as a potential enemy with a hand ready to strike me if I gave them a chance, but I shall not feel like that any more now that I have you. Well, we will go to England, see Agnes and then forget it all."

Lucie in her favourite seat on a cushion on the window-sill, swinging her foot thoughtfully, looked at him gravely.

"When we are in England, Jacques, shall I meet Jim Duncombe?"

Jimmy turned as if he had been shot, and looked at her almost angrily.

"Never in this world, Lucie," he said emphatically. "Jim Duncombe died sixteen years ago. Not even for you will I resurrect him. My mother died soon after Paulette; my father in the War. My brother must have been taught to despise my memory. He has been brought up in the family tradition and is a decent kid, not much older than you, Lucie. I hardly remember him but I respect the family pride. It is Jimmy Smith the journalist you are marrying, Lucie, with not much money and no social position. Do you mind?"

"It is Jacques the *légionnaire* I am marrying," Lucie replied tranquilly. "He has no social position and no money, but he is a MAN. Also I think he loves me, *n'est ce pas*?"

"With all his heart, Lucie. Do you think you could chuck your job here as soon as possible and come with me to England?"

"I think perhaps we might go up to the Soignie and ask Raoul what he thinks about this wedding," Lucie laughed.

"He won't think very highly of it, my child, you may be sure."

Jimmy was right. The Comte was undoubtedly a little shocked at the precipitancy of the lovers; he was also, as a good Frenchman and head of a family, disturbed about the bridegroom's lack of family and fortune. Lucie, whose pride was of another kind than Jimmy Smith's, wanted to take her brother-in-law into their confidence and prove to him that Jimmy Duncombe in insisting on remaining

"dead" was acting from purely chivalrous and altruistic motives. There was a fortune and title awaiting this eldest son of a baronet with large country estates and considerable interests in a coal mine in the neighborhood. Jimmy would have none of it. Lucie had promised to keep the secret and he must hold her to her promise. The Comte de Soignie, in spite of his undoubted liking for Jimmy Smith and approval of his way of dealing with his enemies who were foes of the de Belforts as well, received him coolly and made it quite evident that he had no desire to welcome him as a brother-in-law. Raoul de Soignie was very fond of his pretty sister-in-law; he stood towards her in the relation of an adopted father rather than of brother-in-law because Jeanne, his wife, had commended her little sister to his care and the girl had grown up in his house. He had, moreover, intended to provide for her since the de Belfort fortune had shrunk to almost nothing since the war.

He wanted Lucie to make a suitable marriage with a young man of her own rank and fortune, but also he wanted her to be happy and that, Lucie pointed out, would be impossible without Jacques. The Comte de Soignie yielded at last, more because he had no power to forbid than because he approved, and summoned the elderly de Belfort aunt, who was Lucie's natural chaperone, from Paris. But of the immediate journey to England he would not hear. The wedding must take place at

Soignie in style suited to the bride's rank; it could not be hurried.

Jimmy was annoyed at the fuss, and, half-heartedly, Lucie agreed with him. Yet she, woman like, wanted new clothes and an impressive ceremony, but also she loved Jimmy dearly and knew how he chafed at the delay and publicity. The dispute ended at length in Jimmy going to London alone before the wedding in order to seek that interview with Agnes which should clear up the mystery of the murder at Shells.

He found Agnes in the same little house in the northern suburb of London at which he had called before, but she was alone in the house now except for a baby boy less than a month old, and she had entirely lost her air of well-being. It was late in November and a half-hearted fog was making London dingy and depressing. The little house looked dingy too, and a blight seemed to have fallen on Agnes, who only smiled when she looked at her baby. She received her visitor civilly enough but without enthusiasm and she gave him, at the beginning, no help at all with his tale. Jimmy, meaning to be gentle, grew exasperated with her.

"I've seen your husband, Agnes," he announced abruptly.

She looked at him, startled and obviously alarmed.

"That appears to surprise you?" Jimmy's tone was curt. "Have you any idea where he is or what his business is?"

The girl hesitated; Jimmy's wrath departed as swiftly as it had arisen. After all, he had brought the poor kid bad news, and obviously she was already worried enough about something.

"Look here, Agnes," he said in a friendlier tone. "I don't want to seem impertinent, but for a very special reason I want to know: Is your marriage a success?"

A dull flush spread over the girl's face and she looked away. She gave her visitor the impression of being desperate and friendless and in great need of someone in whom to confide. He patted her hand kindly as it rested on the sleeping baby.

"Tell me, Agnes; I may be able to help. I know something about that husband of yours which you do not know. I've something to tell you, but I would rather you answered my question first."

"Well, if you want the truth," she said sullenly, "it isn't. He only married me because of this," she touched the sleeping baby.

"*Only* because of that? Wasn't it because you knew something about him which he did not want you to tell?"

Agnes gazed at him with the old look of terror which had never left her face during the days of the inquest.

"I can't tell you," she whispered hoarsely. "I dare not."

"You did not love your husband?" he persisted.

"I did at first," she protested. "And then, though I was still fond of him, I was frightened. Lately, he and the old man have been so unkind to me and I have been so much alone."

"Who is the old man and where is he?"

"I don't know where he is. He is Joe's uncle. At first they told me he was Joe's father but afterwards I found that he had taken charge of him since he was little and had brought him up. Not that that matters."

"As it happens it matters very much, Agnes. This uncle is a Jew and probably the brother of your husband's mother. Joe's father was a Moorish Arab. A very different thing."

"There doesn't seem much difference to me." Agnes spoke with a sudden temper. "They are not English, that's what matters, and they haven't English ways. They are cruel and greedy and they don't know how to treat a Christian girl."

"Have they hurt you, physically I mean?"

"I'm black and blue," Agnes answered simply. "They were so afraid I should tell after Joe and I started quarrelling that they beat me and twisted my arms and shut me up in the dark though it was only a month or so before baby was born. The trouble started," she went on resentfully, "just after you came here to see me. Joe had been all right before that. He said I had been telling you things and would not listen to me when I swore I had not. Why did you come?"

Jimmy ignored the question.

"How long is it since Joe went away?"

"Not so very long after you were here. Sometime in September. The old man came at first and brought me money, but I have not seen him for several weeks. I don't know what I am going to do about money if Joe does not come back soon."

This was a complication which Jimmy had not foreseen. He had supposed that after he had heard what this girl had to say and had repeated it to Lucie the whole chapter would be closed and he could start life anew. In order to provide for Agnes and her child he would have to blackmail the old Jewish uncle—anonymously of course, which was beastly—and make him get hold of some of Bou Smain's money in order to bring up Bou Smain's grandson and support Bou Smain's daughter-in-law. Ah, well, it was—ironically—a very fitting punishment for him.

"Joe will not come back, Agnes," he said gently. "He is dead."

Agnes looked at him with relief and sorrow and incredulity flitting swiftly over her face.

"How do you know?" she gasped at last, and Jimmy was glad to see that relief was the most lasting of her emotions.

"He was cleaning a gun and it went off," he lied. "He did not have time to suffer much or to make any arrangements about you. His father was already dead. However, the old man was rich and we'll see that this old uncle, Isaac, isn't he? gets some of this money for you and the boy. On the whole I think it is

a thing to be glad about rather than grieved, Agnes."

Reluctantly she confessed that it was so. "But I was very fond of him once," she insisted.

"I am sure you were," Jimmy said consolingly. "But since it cannot hurt him any more I want you to tell me what happened that night at Shells. The murderer is dead and morally you were not guilty in the part you took and for my own reasons I have no intention of telling the police. Out with it, Agnes. I've particular reasons for it."

As she still hesitated, he added, reluctantly. "As a matter of fact it was a blood feud, a vendetta, you know, and it all began many years ago when your husband's father murdered my sister, but that was not in England and did not concern the English police. You see why I want to, why I *ought* to know?"

Agnes nodded.

"Poor Judy. You know I wouldn't willingly have hurt her, d—on't you, Mr. Smith?" (Jimmy assented readily.) "Well on that night of the party Judy and I went along to Tom Williams' house as soon as we had finished with the dinner things and turned down the beds at the 'Anglers' Rest.' That must have been about nine o'clock. Judy was laughing and more excited than I'd ever known her. She was very fond of Tom Williams 'because he was so gentle' she said, but for a long time she would not promise to marry him; she told

me sometimes she was scared to. But when I asked 'why?' she said she did not know. At last, though, she had made up her mind and Tom had bought a ring for her. I wasn't feeling very happy because of this," again she laid her hand lightly on the sleeping child.

"I was afraid Joe was going to let me down. But I forgot that later. There was port wine, or it may have been sherry, and I drank a lot of it and got rather excited. About ten o'clock someone came and said Joe was outside and wanted to speak to me. I did not get up at once and when I did he was standing in the doorway looking about the room and did not seem to notice when I spoke to him, so I pulled his sleeve and he looked round and said 'Come out of here.' I'm afraid I must have had a good deal of drink because I do not remember saying goodbye to anyone or of going to get my outdoor things. But I seemed all right when I got outside. 'So that's your pal Judy?' Joe said as we went down to the towing path. 'Do you like her?' I asked and he said, 'Oh, she's not my style, it's fair girls for me.'

"He didn't say anything else except just silliness until we were going back to the hotel. Then he said, 'Oh, I've brought you a ring. You can say we're engaged and we'll get married soon. Then your Judy won't be superior.' I was terribly relieved, Mr. Smith, I had begun to think he wouldn't do it. 'You show that ring to Judy when you get up to bed,' he said laughing. 'And, I say, you might leave a

corner of the blind drawn so that I can look into the room from the bridge and see how she takes it. I'll go before you start getting undressed so that you needn't be shy. I came down on my motor-bike and I've got to get back to London to-night.' We said good night and just as he was going he called out 'Don't forget the blind.' "

"That's what the men on the verandah heard, I suppose?"

Agnes nodded and went on, "I stopped to speak to them and then went up to bed. Judy had just come in and was full of the party, and I didn't get a chance to say a word for a bit, so I arranged the blind as I had promised Joe, for although Judy was undressing she was my side of the room well out of sight of the bridge until she got into bed. I thought I would wait until she was in bed before I told her about it, then Joe could have his little joke. He said he would throw an orange in when he was going. It was quite easy for a good thrower to hit Judy's bed; Joe had done it several times before and I thought it rather a joke. She showed me her ring and put it in a little black bag under her pillow and got into bed. Joe hadn't thrown the orange and I went to the window and waved my hand but I could not see him there. 'What are you doing that for?' Judy asked, and I said 'I promised to wave good night to Joe.' Then I came back into the room and stood by her bed.

" 'You're not the only one with an engage-

ment ring,' I said laughingly and put mine on her finger. She gave a scream and looked as white as the sheet of her bed. 'Where did you get this?' she asked. I was frightened by that time and wondering what it all meant. I was a bit annoyed too because we were friends and I thought she would be glad Joe was going to do the right thing by me, for she knew all about it and called him all kinds of ugly names. 'It's my engagement ring,' I said rather sharply, 'Joe has just given it to me and we're going to be married next month.' Instead of saying anything to that Judy whispered 'I knew they'd get me,' and sat up in bed with her white face staring and staring as if she saw something dreadful. Suddenly she turned and buried her face in her pillow and cried and cried as if her heart was broken. She didn't answer anything when I spoke to her except at last in a very angry tone when she cried out:

" 'Oh for heaven's sake leave me alone. Put the light out and get into bed.' I was angry, too, by that time and she still had my ring on. But I knew it was no good trying to do anything with her, so I put the light out and got into bed. I forgot all about the blind of course. Judy sobbed for a long time but at last I went to sleep. I woke up suddenly thinking I heard a funny noise. The sun was up but it wasn't very light in the room. I got out of bed and pulled the blind aside a bit more. There was a man on the bridge looking down into the room. I thought I must be dreaming, for the

man was Joe. He had changed his grey suit for a dark one and his hat was pulled over his eyes and under his arm he had what looked like a long curved rod—a fishing-rod I thought it was at first. He was making signs to me but I could not make out what he meant at first. I turned back into the room to get a coat or something so that I could lean out of the window and see him better. As I turned I looked towards Judy's bed and screamed. In her throat was stuck an arrow and she was gurgling and making a funny noise. I'm not very quick but somehow I knew that it had some connection with the ring and that Joe had thrown—shot, isn't it?—that arrow meaning to kill Judy.

"Why otherwise had she been so frightened? I knew no one must see it and what he meant by his signs. I ran over to the bed and pulled and pulled; I knew I was hurting Judy and making the wound much worse but I could not help that; I realised quite clearly what it would mean to me if Joe were caught. He had counted on that, of course, he told me after, and was sure that by marrying me he would shut my mouth. At last I got the thing out and threw it out of the window as far as I could, wiping it and holding it with the skirt of my nightgown to prevent the blood dripping on the window-sill. Joe had gone down from the bridge and was in a skiff. The arrow fell near the bank and he put one foot on the grass, picked it up and rowed away as

fast as he could down the river to Staines. It only took about two minutes and not a soul seemed to be about. When he had gone again I screamed again much louder, opened the door and ran out into the passage. You know the rest."

"Not quite all What happened to the nightdress?"

"I dropped it behind Mrs. Huxham's door which had a long curtain. Later in the morning when the police and the doctor were out looking in the garden I fetched it with some dirty towels and put it into the wash-tub when Janet wasn't looking. I had promised to help her the day before, fortunately."

"And Joe didn't communicate with you at all?"

"He wrote me a letter the same day, but no one else would have known what he meant. I've forgotten what he said now. I pushed it into the copper fire as soon as I had read it, but he promised again to marry me as soon as possible."

"After you were married I suppose he told you something about it?"

Agnes shook her head. "Not really. He said he was practising for the archery competition. I knew he belonged to a club and was a very good shot, as he had won lots of prizes. But he swore it was an accident. He had meant to hit the window-frame and wake me up. I didn't really believe him but I had learnt not to ask questions. If it hadn't been

for the baby I should probably have told the truth. But how could I risk him going to prison or being hanged? How could I, Mr. Smith?"

"You couldn't, Agnes. It would have wanted more bravery than it took to allow yourself to be suspected."

"I hadn't realised at first, of course, that they would be bound to suspect me. Poor Judy, as if I would have harmed her. Then I thought I would be better dead than left like that."

"Joe didn't tell you that he knew Judy?"

"No. He always swore that he had never seen her except on the night of the party."

"That may be true, but he knew who she was and where to find her. Do you know what he did afterwards?"

"Yes. He had gone back part of the way the night before and met his cousin and changed motor-bikes with him. So that it was Joe's bike of which the policeman took the number but Joe was not riding it. Then he left the second bike in the garden of an empty house between Shells and Staines. No one saw him get it in the morning. He had borrowed the skiff from one of the river bungalows. No one saw him take or return that. It was just the time of all the twenty-four hours when fewest people are about. Of course his uncle and cousin swore he had been in bed all night. The cousin's bicycle was not kept at the same garage; there was nothing to arouse any

suspicion. I was the only person who had seen him, except the old lady whom they did not believe."

"It was an extraordinary risk for him to take. Supposing he had been caught?"

And then the simple girl said something which amazed the man of much experience. Agnes, he realised, was far less stupid than he had supposed.

"Why, Mr. Smith," she exclaimed in surprise. "You know these Jews, Arabs or whatever they are don't seem to mind what happens to them. They say—at least I have heard Joe say often 'Inshallah,' which he told me means 'It is the will of God.' "

"That's what Judy said, too, as she died." Jimmy rose to take his leave. "Well, Agnes, I suppose you know that all your life silence will be the best policy, both for your sake and for the boy's?"

She nodded.

"I'll see you get some money," he added as he held her hand. "We all have to go through some form of punishment for disobeying good laws." But that, naturally, Agnes did not understand.

At the Chateau above Soignie, to which the snow-capped mountains seemed to have drawn closer and which seemed to Jacques very cold and isolated, he found Lucie waiting eagerly for him.

"I'm more sorry than I can say, Jacques, that I had to let you go alone. Poor Judith.

Poor Agnes. They were, perhaps, ill-wished. Even Bou Smain had a point of view though. Murder of a Christian is allowed to one whose honour had been stained."

"And Paulette?" Jimmy asked harshly.

She laid her little hand across his mouth.

"The saddest of all, beloved," she whispered. "That I must help you to forget. To-morrow we must please Raoul by going through with our marriage in the 'convenable' manner and then you and I will begin life anew, *n'cest ce pas?*"

She looked up at him with wistful eyes and provocative mouth and Jimmy, instead of answering, caught her in his arms and kissed her.

THE END

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LONG SHADOWS